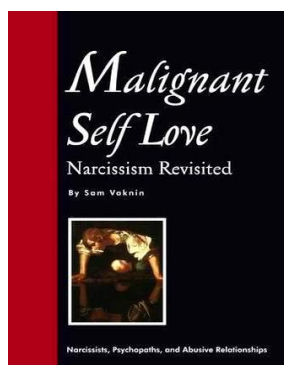


Terrorism as a Psychodynamic Phenomenon

A Case of Group Psychopathology

Dialog between: Michael Galak and [Sam Vaknin](#)

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Introduction by Michael Galak

In traditional Jewish fashion the original idea for this dialog came to me when I was 55. I felt compelled to write it despite its lack of orthodoxy and political correctness. In this rumbling and sometimes ranting opus magnum I have attempted to convey my understanding of the mechanisms underlying the formation and responses of group psychopathology and the resulting behavior in the circumstances of a totalitarian society. The size of the group, its ethnic, racial or religious identification are mostly irrelevant to the theoretical construct of this concept. It could extend to a nation or even a group of nations, as long as this group has common characteristics developed under common circumstances.

Using psychodynamic considerations I have also attempted to delineate some practical implications to the macro- and micro-management of group psychopathology. In my work I

have drawn upon writings of August Le Bon, John Mackay, Sigmund Freud, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Melanie Klein, Sydney Bloch, Otto Kernberg, Heinz Kohut, Donald Winnicott, Paul Johnson and many others. I acknowledge my indebtedness and gratitude to these authors.

Sam Vaknin:

Are you acquainted with the work of Lloyd DeMaus on psychohistory?

In their book *"Personality Disorders in Modern Life"*, Theodore Millon and Roger Davis state, as a matter of fact, that pathological narcissism was the preserve of "the royal and the wealthy" and that it "seems to have gained prominence only in the late twentieth century". Narcissism, according to them, may be associated with "higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs ... Individuals in less advantaged nations .. are too busy trying (to survive) ... to be arrogant and grandiose".

They - like Lasch before them - attribute pathological narcissism to "a society that stresses individualism and self-gratification at the expense of community, namely the United States." They assert that the disorder is more prevalent among certain professions with "star power" or respect. "In an individualistic culture, the narcissist is 'God's gift to the world'. In a collectivist society, the narcissist is 'God's gift to the collective'".

Millon quotes Warren and Caponi's *"The Role of Culture in the Development of Narcissistic Personality Disorders in America, Japan and Denmark"*:

"Individualistic narcissistic structures of self-regard (in individualistic societies) ... are rather self-contained and independent ... (In collectivist cultures) narcissistic configurations of the we-self ... denote self-esteem derived from strong identification with the reputation and honor of the family, groups, and others in hierarchical relationships."

Having lived in the last 20 years 12 countries in 4 continents - from the impoverished to the affluent, with individualistic and collectivist societies - I know that Millon and Davis are wrong. Theirs is, indeed, the quintessential American point of view which lacks an intimate knowledge of other parts of the world. Millon even wrongly claims that the DSM's international equivalent, the ICD, does not include the narcissistic personality disorder (it does).

Pathological narcissism is a ubiquitous phenomenon because every human being - regardless of the nature of his society and culture - develops healthy narcissism early in life. Healthy narcissism is rendered pathological by abuse - and abuse, alas, is a universal human behavior. By "abuse" we mean any refusal to acknowledge the emerging boundaries of the individual - smothering, doting, and excessive expectations - are as abusive as beating and incest.

There are malignant narcissists among subsistence farmers in Africa, nomads in the Sinai desert, day laborers in east Europe, and intellectuals and socialites in Manhattan. Malignant narcissism is all-pervasive and independent of culture and society.

It is true, though, that the WAY pathological narcissism manifests and is experienced is dependent on the particulars of societies and cultures. In some cultures, it is encouraged, in others suppressed. In some societies it is channeled against minorities - in others it is tainted

with paranoia. In collectivist societies, it may be projected onto the collective, in individualistic societies, it is an individual's trait.

Yet, can families, organizations, ethnic groups, churches, and even whole nations be safely described as "narcissistic" or "pathologically self-absorbed"? Wouldn't such generalizations be a trifle racist and more than a trifle wrong? The answer is: it depends.

Human collectives - states, firms, households, institutions, political parties, cliques, bands - acquire a life and a character all their own. The longer the association or affiliation of the members, the more cohesive and conformist the inner dynamics of the group, the more persecutory or numerous its enemies, the more intensive the physical and emotional experiences of the individuals it is comprised of, the stronger the bonds of locale, language, and history - the more rigorous might an assertion of a common pathology be.

Such an all-pervasive and extensive pathology manifests itself in the behavior of each and every member. It is a defining - though often implicit or underlying - mental structure. It has explanatory and predictive powers. It is recurrent and invariable - a pattern of conduct melded with distorted cognition and stunted emotions. And it is often vehemently denied.

A possible DSM-like list of criteria for narcissistic organizations or groups:

An all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration or adulation and lack of empathy, usually beginning at the group's early history and present in various contexts. Persecution and abuse are often the causes - or at least the antecedents - of the pathology.

Five (or more) of the following criteria must be met:

1. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - feel grandiose and self-important (e.g., they exaggerate the group's achievements and talents to the point of lying, demand to be recognized as superior - simply for belonging to the group and without commensurate achievement).
2. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are obsessed with group fantasies of unlimited success, fame, fearsome power or omnipotence, unequalled brilliance, bodily beauty or performance, or ideal, everlasting, all-conquering ideals or political theories.
3. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are firmly convinced that the group is unique and, being special, can only be understood by, should only be treated by, or associate with, other special or unique, or high-status groups (or institutions).
4. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - require excessive admiration, adulation, attention and affirmation - or, failing that, wish to be feared and to be notorious (narcissistic supply).

5. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - feel entitled. They expect unreasonable or special and favorable priority treatment. They demand automatic and full compliance with expectations. They rarely accept responsibility for their actions ("alloplastic defenses"). This often leads to anti-social behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
6. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are "interpersonally exploitative", i.e., use others to achieve their own ends. This often leads to anti-social behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
7. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are devoid of empathy. They are unable or unwilling to identify with or acknowledge the feelings and needs of other groups. This often leads to anti-social behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
8. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are constantly envious of others or believes that they feel the same about them. This often leads to anti-social behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
9. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are arrogant and sport haughty behaviors or attitudes coupled with rage when frustrated, contradicted, punished, limited, or confronted. This often leads to anti-social behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.

Consider the case of the Jews.

The Jews have been subjected to the kind of trauma and abuse I mentioned earlier on an unprecedented and never repeated scale. Their formal scriptures, lore, and ethos are imbued with grandiose fantasies and a towering sense of superiority and "mission". Yet, the inevitable contempt for their inferiors is tampered by the all-pervasive pragmatism the Jews had to develop in order to survive. Narcissists are not pragmatic. They live in a Universe of their own making. They see no need to get along with others. Jews are not like that. Their creed is a practical survival guide which obliges them to accommodate others, to empathize with their needs and desires, to compromise, to admit errors, to share credit, to collaborate, and so on.

Israelis, on the other hand, are "unshackled" Jews. They believe themselves to be the mirror image of the diaspora Jew. They are physical ("somatic"), strong, productive, independent, in control. They, in short, are less bound by the need to perilously co-exist with baleful, predatory, majorities. They can allow themselves a full, unmitigated, expression of whatever defence mechanisms they evolved in response to millennia of virulent hatred and murderous persecutions. Being an Israeli, I gained privileged insight into this fascinating transformation from tortured slave to vengeful master.

Michael:

I also aim to draw a parallel between the now defunct Soviet Union and the Arab states, as an illustration of the origin of group psychopathology, because of the closeness of their respective political positions, the totalitarian approach to their governance and their messianic worldview.

Rulers of both are/were notorious for their contempt of their subject people and their willingness to inflict suffering in order to remain in power.

There are some important and practical implications which could be drawn from these comparisons. For example, I have come to believe that the lifestyle inflicted by totalitarian states on their citizens leads, among other things, to a heightened state of group anxiety, fear of rejection, unfulfilled dependency needs and anger towards the rejector. These traits are open to manipulation by the aspirants to the mantle of Messiah and the ruling elites, eager to redirect the relentless anger of their people away from themselves and towards their desired political goals. It is conceivable that the knowledge of the basis and of techniques of such a manipulation could be useful in the successful management of conflict situations.

Sam:

Institutionalized religion and totalitarian states share the same defense mechanisms (such as projection and splitting), coping methods, and psychodynamic background. Authoritarian leaders are virtual clones, regardless of the cultures and societies that gave rise to them (see Alan Bullock's magnificent "Hitler and Stalin - Parallel Lives").

This is why I call Hitler an "inverted" saint.

Hitler and Nazism are often portrayed as an apocalyptic and seismic break with European history. Yet the truth is that they were the culmination and reification of European history in the 19th century. Europe's annals of colonialism have prepared it for the range of phenomena associated with the Nazi regime - from industrial murder to racial theories, from slave labour to the forcible annexation of territory.

Germany was a colonial power no different to murderous Belgium or Britain. What set it apart is that it directed its colonial attentions at the heartland of Europe - rather than at Africa or Asia. Both World Wars were colonial wars fought on European soil. Moreover, Nazi Germany innovated by applying prevailing racial theories (usually reserved to non-whites) to the white race itself. It started with the Jews - a non-controversial proposition - but then expanded them to include "east European" whites, such as the Poles and the Russians.

Germany was not alone in its malignant nationalism. The far right in France was as pernicious. Nazism - and Fascism - were world ideologies, adopted enthusiastically in places as diverse as Iraq, Egypt, Norway, Latin America, and Britain. At the end of the 1930's, liberal capitalism, communism, and fascism (and its mutations) were locked in mortal battle of ideologies. Hitler's mistake was to delusionally believe in the affinity between capitalism and Nazism - an affinity enhanced, to his mind, by Germany's corporatism and by the existence of a common enemy: global communism.

Colonialism always had discernible religious overtones and often collaborated with missionary religion. "The White Man's burden" of civilizing the "savages" was widely

perceived as ordained by God. The church was the extension of the colonial power's army and trading companies.

It is no wonder that Hitler's lebensraum colonial movement - Nazism - possessed all the hallmarks of an institutional religion: priesthood, rites, rituals, temples, worship, catechism, mythology. Hitler was this religion's ascetic saint. He monastically denied himself earthly pleasures (or so he claimed) in order to be able to dedicate himself fully to his calling. Hitler was a monstrously inverted Jesus, sacrificing his life and denying himself so that (Aryan) humanity should benefit. By surpassing and suppressing his humanity, Hitler became a distorted version of [Nietzsche's "superman"](#).

But being a-human or super-human also means being a-sexual and a-moral. In this restricted sense, Hitler was a post-modernist and a moral relativist. He projected to the masses an androgynous figure and enhanced it by fostering the adoration of nudity and all things "natural". But what Nazism referred to as "nature" was not natural at all.

It was an aesthetic of decadence and evil (though it was not perceived this way by the Nazis), carefully orchestrated, and artificial. Nazism was about reproduced copies, not about originals. It was about the manipulation of symbols - not about veritable atavism.

In short: Nazism was about theatre, not about life. To enjoy the spectacle (and be subsumed by it), Nazism demanded the suspension of judgment, depersonalization, and de-realization. Catharsis was tantamount, in Nazi dramaturgy, to self-annulment. Nazism was nihilistic not only operationally, or ideologically. Its very language and narratives were nihilistic. Nazism was conspicuous nihilism - and Hitler served as a role model, annihilating Hitler the Man, only to re-appear as Hitler the stychia (pre-ordained and irresistible force of nature).

What was the role of the Jews in all this?

Nazism posed as a rebellion against the "old ways" - against the hegemonic culture, the upper classes, the established religions, the superpowers, the European order. The Nazis borrowed the Leninist vocabulary and assimilated it effectively. Hitler and the Nazis were an adolescent movement, a reaction to narcissistic injuries inflicted upon a narcissistic (and rather psychopathic) toddler nation-state. Hitler himself was a [malignant narcissist](#), as Fromm correctly noted.

The Jews constituted a perfect, easily identifiable, embodiment of all that was "wrong" with Europe. They were an old nation, they were eerily disembodied (without a territory), they were cosmopolitan, they were part of the establishment, they were "decadent", they were hated on religious and socio-economic grounds (see Goldhagen's "Hitler's Willing Executioners"), they were different, they were narcissistic (felt and acted as morally superior), they were everywhere, they were defenseless, they were credulous, they were adaptable (and thus could be co-opted to collaborate in their own destruction). They were the perfect hated father figure and parricide was in fashion.

This is precisely the source of the fascination with Hitler, diagnosed by Erich Fromm - together with Stalin - as a malignant narcissist. He was an inverted human. His unconscious was his conscious. He acted out our most repressed drives, fantasies, and wishes. He provides us with a glimpse of the horrors that lie beneath the veneer, the barbarians at our personal gates, and what it was like before we invented civilization. Hitler forced us all through a time

warp and many did not emerge. He was not the devil. He was one of us. He was what Arendt aptly called the banality of evil. Just an ordinary, mentally disturbed, failure, a member of a mentally disturbed and failing nation, who lived through disturbed and failing times. He was the perfect mirror, a channel, a voice, and the very depth of our souls.

The narcissistic leader is the culmination and reification of his period, culture, and civilization. He is likely to rise to prominence in narcissistic societies.

The malignant narcissist invents and then projects a false, fictitious, self for the world to fear, or to admire. He maintains a tenuous grasp on reality to start with and this is further exacerbated by the trappings of power. The narcissist's grandiose self-delusions and fantasies of omnipotence and omniscience are supported by real life authority and the narcissist's predilection to surround himself with obsequious sycophants.

The narcissist's personality is so precariously balanced that he cannot tolerate even a hint of criticism and disagreement. Most narcissists are paranoid and suffer from ideas of reference (the delusion that they are being mocked or discussed when they are not). Thus, narcissists often regard themselves as "victims of persecution".

As we said, minorities or "others" - often arbitrarily selected - constitute a perfect, easily identifiable, embodiment of all that is "wrong". They are accused of being old, they are eerily disembodied, they are cosmopolitan, they are part of the establishment, they are "decadent", they are hated on religious and socio-economic grounds, or because of their race, sexual orientation, origin ... They are different, they are narcissistic (feel and act as morally superior), they are everywhere, they are defenseless, they are credulous, they are adaptable (and thus can be co-opted to collaborate in their own destruction). They are the perfect hate figure. Narcissists thrive on hatred and pathological envy.

The narcissistic leader prefers the sparkle and glamour of well-orchestrated illusions to the tedium and method of real accomplishments. His reign is all smoke and mirrors, devoid of substances, consisting of mere appearances and mass delusions. In the aftermath of his regime - the narcissistic leader having died, been deposed, or voted out of office - it all unravels. The tireless and constant prestidigitation ceases and the entire edifice crumbles. What looked like an economic miracle turns out to have been a fraud-laced bubble. Loosely-held empires disintegrate. Laboriously assembled business conglomerates go to pieces. "Earth shattering" and "revolutionary" scientific discoveries and theories are discredited. Social experiments end in mayhem.

It is important to understand that the use of violence must be ego-syntonic. It must accord with the self-image of the narcissist. It must abet and sustain his grandiose fantasies and feed his sense of entitlement. It must conform with the narcissistic narrative.

Thus, a narcissist who regards himself as the benefactor of the poor, a member of the common folk, the representative of the disenfranchised, the champion of the dispossessed against the corrupt elite - is highly unlikely to use violence at first.

The pacific mask crumbles when the narcissist has become convinced that the very people he purported to speak for, his constituency, his grassroots fans, the prime sources of his narcissistic supply - have turned against him. At first, in a desperate effort to maintain the fiction underlying his chaotic personality, the narcissist strives to explain away the sudden

reversal of sentiment. "The people are being duped by (the media, big industry, the military, the elite, etc.)", "they don't really know what they are doing", "following a rude awakening, they will revert to form", etc.

When these flimsy attempts to patch a tattered personal mythology fail - the narcissist is injured. Narcissistic injury inevitably leads to narcissistic rage and to a terrifying display of unbridled aggression. The pent-up frustration and hurt translate into devaluation. That which was previously idealized - is now discarded with contempt and hatred.

This primitive defense mechanism is called "splitting". To the narcissist, things and people are either entirely bad (evil) or entirely good. He projects onto others his own shortcomings and negative emotions, thus becoming a totally good object. A narcissistic leader is likely to justify the butchering of his own people by claiming that they intended to kill him, undo the revolution, devastate the economy, or the country, etc.

The "small people", the "rank and file", the "loyal soldiers" of the narcissist - his flock, his nation, his employees - they pay the price. The disillusionment and disenchantment are agonizing. The process of reconstruction, of rising from the ashes, of overcoming the trauma of having been deceived, exploited and manipulated - is drawn-out. It is difficult to trust again, to have faith, to love, to be led, to collaborate. Feelings of shame and guilt engulf the erstwhile followers of the narcissist. This is his sole legacy: a massive post-traumatic stress disorder.

More here:

[*Narcissists in Positions of Authority*](#)

[*What Doth a Leader Make?*](#)

[*Fascism - The Tensile Permanence*](#)

[*For the Love of God*](#)

[*Facilitating Narcissism*](#)

[*The Cult of the Narcissist*](#)

[*The Narcissist and Social Institutions*](#)

Michael:

The essence of this dialog could be reduced to two fundamental notions. The first notion stipulates, that a totalitarian state, be it secular or clerical, imposes on its citizens a permanent state of fear as an emotional background. The citizenry of totalitarian or violently dictatorial states has no legitimate means to discharge this fear. This continuous state of fear, or anxiety as it is clinically called, leads to a development of a group psychopathology. The development of group characteristics consists of personal exposure to the same conditions, including stress, multiplied and amplified by the number of participants.

The second notion stipulates that group psychopathology is characterized by the variety of enduring, often self-harming responses and traits, such as maladaptive coping and care-eliciting techniques, emotional vulnerability, unfulfilled dependency needs, anti-social behavior and other characteristics of personality disorders, extended to the whole or a majority of the given group. They become woven into the fabric of the national character and behavior. It could happen to a whole nation, traumatized by external and internal stressors, e.g. the Palestinians, or to a marginalised subgroup, such as the Australian Aborigines or Afro-American dwellers of inner city enclaves. Rules of interpersonal contact within these groups are quite different from the rules governing interpersonal contact in the mainstream society.

In societies with a low level of group psychopathology, these traits are given the status of personal psychopathology and are regarded as personality disorders, treatable psychiatrically.

Sam:

Here I beg to differ. A personal psychopathology that is indistinguishable from the "background noise" of mass or collective psychopathology is unlikely to be diagnosed as such. In a narcissistic society, narcissism is de-rigueur - not an aberration. Conversely, some mental health syndromes and disorders are "culture-bound" - they are specific to one culture only and rarely appear elsewhere.

Consider the case of pathological narcissism:

We are surrounded by malignant narcissists. How come this disorder has hitherto been largely ignored? How come there is such a dearth of research and literature regarding this crucial family of pathologies? Even mental health practitioners are woefully unaware of it and unprepared to assist its victims.

The sad answer is that narcissism meshes well with our culture [see: <http://samvak.tripod.com/lasch.html>].

It is kind of a "background cosmic radiation", permeating every social and cultural interaction. It is hard to distinguish pathological narcissists from self-assertive, self-confident, self-promoting, eccentric, or highly individualistic persons. Hard sell, greed, envy, self-centredness, exploitativeness, diminished empathy - are all socially condoned features of Western civilization.

Our society is atomized, the outcome of individualism gone awry. It encourages narcissistic leadership and role models: <http://samvak.tripod.com/15.html>

Its sub-structures - institutionalized religion, political parties, civic organizations, the media, corporations - are all suffused with narcissism and pervaded by its pernicious outcomes: <http://samvak.tripod.com/14.html>

The very ethos of materialism and capitalism upholds certain narcissistic traits, such as reduced empathy, exploitation, a sense of entitlement, or grandiose fantasies ("vision").

More about this here: <http://samvak.tripod.com/journal37.html>

Narcissists are aided, abetted and facilitated by four types of people and institutions: the adulators, the blissfully ignorant, the self-deceiving and those deceived by the narcissist.

The adulators are fully aware of the nefarious and damaging aspects of the narcissist's behavior but believe that they are more than balanced by the benefits - to themselves, to their collective, or to society at large. They engage in an explicit trade-off between some of their principles and values - and their personal profit, or the greater good.

They seek to help the narcissist, promote his agenda, shield him from harm, connect him with like-minded people, do his chores for him and, in general, create the conditions and the environment for his success. This kind of alliance is especially prevalent in political parties, the government, multinational, religious organizations and other hierarchical collectives.

The blissfully ignorant are simply unaware of the "bad sides" of the narcissist- and make sure they remain so. They look the other way, or pretend that the narcissist's behavior is normative, or turn a blind eye to his egregious misbehavior. They are classic deniers of reality. Some of them maintain a generally rosy outlook premised on the inbred benevolence of Mankind. Others simply cannot tolerate dissonance and discord. They prefer to live in a fantastic world where everything is harmonious and smooth and evil is banished. They react with rage to any information to the contrary and block it out instantly. This type of denial is well evidenced in dysfunctional families.

The self-deceivers are fully aware of the narcissist's transgressions and malice, his indifference, exploitativeness, lack of empathy, and rampant grandiosity - but they prefer to displace the causes, or the effects of such misconduct. They attribute it to externalities ("a rough patch"), or judge it to be temporary. They even go as far as accusing the victim for the narcissist's lapses, or for defending themselves ("She provoked him").

In a feat of cognitive dissonance, they deny any connection between the acts of the narcissist and their consequences ("His wife abandoned him because she was promiscuous, not because of anything he did to her"). They are swayed by the narcissist's undeniable charm, intelligence, or attractiveness. But the narcissist needs not invest resources in converting them to his cause - he does not deceive them. They are self-propelled into the abyss that is narcissism. The [inverted narcissists](#), for instance, is a self-deceiver.

The deceived are people - or institutions, or collectives - deliberately taken for a premeditated ride by the narcissist. He feeds them false information, manipulates their judgment, proffers plausible scenarios to account for his indiscretions, soils the opposition, charms them, appeals to their reason, or to their emotions, and promises the Moon.

Again, the narcissist's incontrovertible powers of persuasion and his impressive personality play a part in this predatory ritual. The deceived are especially hard to deprogram. They are often themselves encumbered with narcissistic traits and find it impossible to admit a mistake, or to atone.

They are likely to stay on with the narcissist to his - and their - bitter end.

Regrettably, the narcissist rarely pays the price for his offenses. His victims pick up the tab. But even here the malignant optimism of the abused never ceases to amaze (read this: <http://samvak.tripod.com/journal27.html>).

Narcissists are an elusive breed, hard to spot, harder to pinpoint, impossible to capture. Even an experienced mental health diagnostician with unmitigated access to the record and to the person examined would find it fiendishly difficult to determine with any degree of certainty whether someone suffers from an impairment, i.e., a mental health disorder – or merely possesses narcissistic traits, a narcissistic personality structure ("character"), or a narcissistic "overlay" superimposed on another mental health problem.

Moreover, it is important to distinguish between the traits and behavior patterns that are independent of the patient's cultural-social context (i.e., inherent, or idiosyncratic) - and reactive patterns, or conformity to cultural and social mores and edicts. Reactions to severe life crises are often characterized by transient pathological narcissism, for instance (Ronningstam and Gunderson, 1996). But such reactions do not a narcissist make.

When a person lives in a society and culture that has often been described as narcissistic by the leading lights of scholarly research (e.g., [Theodore Millon](#)) and social thinking (e.g., [Christopher Lasch](#)) - how much of his behavior can be attributed to his milieu – and which of his traits are really his?

Moreover, there is a qualitative difference between having narcissistic traits, a narcissistic personality, or the Narcissistic Personality Disorder. The latter is rigorously defined in the DSM IV-TR and includes strict criteria and differential diagnoses (for more, see here: <http://samvak.tripod.com/npdglance.html>).

Narcissism is regarded by many scholars to be an adaptative strategy ("healthy narcissism"). It is considered pathological in the clinical sense only when it becomes a rigid personality structure replete with a series of primitive defence mechanisms (such as splitting, projection, Projective Identification, intellectualization) – and when it leads to dysfunctions in one or more areas of life.

Pathological narcissism is the art of deception. The narcissist projects a False Self and manages all his social interactions through this concocted fictional construct. People often find themselves involved with a narcissist (emotionally, in business, or otherwise) before they have a chance to discover his true nature.

When the narcissist reveals his true colors, it is usually far too late. His victims are unable to separate from him. They are frustrated by this acquired helplessness and angry that they failed to see through the narcissist earlier on.

More here:

[The Classification of Cultures](#)

Michael:

Still, in societies traumatised by dictatorships, the high level of group anxiety leads to a tendency towards the universal adoption of a maladaptive mode of interpersonal communication, so strikingly different to an outside observer from that of a non-traumatised society. These differences may cause communication difficulties between people who reside in societies with a high level of group psychopathology and those living in a society with a relatively low level of group psychopathology.

Sam:

Assuming, of course, we can agree on what constitutes psychopathology.

"You can know the name of a bird in all the languages of the world, but when you're finished, you'll know absolutely nothing whatever about the bird... So let's look at the bird and see what it's doing – that's what counts. I learned very early the difference between knowing the name of something and knowing something."

Richard Feynman, Physicist and 1965 Nobel Prize laureate (1918-1988)

"You have all I dare say heard of the animal spirits and how they are transfused from father to son etcetera etcetera – well you may take my word that nine parts in ten of a man's sense or his nonsense, his successes and miscarriages in this world depend on their motions and activities, and the different tracks and trains you put them into, so that when they are once set a-going, whether right or wrong, away they go cluttering like hey-go-mad."

Lawrence Sterne (1713-1758), "The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman" (1759)

I. Overview

Someone is considered mentally "ill" if:

1. His conduct rigidly and consistently deviates from the typical, average behavior of all other people in his culture and society that fit his profile (whether this conventional behavior is moral or rational is immaterial), or
2. His judgment and grasp of objective, physical reality is impaired, and
3. His conduct is not a matter of choice but is innate and irresistible, and
4. His behavior causes him or others discomfort, and is
5. Dysfunctional, self-defeating, and self-destructive even by his own yardsticks.

Descriptive criteria aside, what is the *essence* of mental disorders? Are they merely physiological disorders of the brain, or, more precisely of its chemistry? If so, can they be cured by restoring the balance of substances and secretions in that mysterious organ? And, once equilibrium is reinstated – is the illness "gone" or is it still lurking there, "under wraps", waiting to erupt? Are psychiatric problems inherited, rooted in faulty genes (though amplified by environmental factors) – or brought on by abusive or wrong nurturance?

These questions are the domain of the "medical" school of mental health.

Others cling to the spiritual view of the human psyche. They believe that mental ailments amount to the metaphysical discomposure of an unknown medium – the soul. Theirs is a holistic approach, taking in the patient in his or her entirety, as well as his milieu.

The members of the functional school regard mental health disorders as perturbations in the proper, statistically "normal", behaviors and manifestations of "healthy" individuals, or as dysfunctions. The "sick" individual – ill at ease with himself (ego-dystonic) or making others

unhappy (deviant) – is "mended" when rendered functional again by the prevailing standards of his social and cultural frame of reference.

In a way, the three schools are akin to the trio of blind men who render disparate descriptions of the very same elephant. Still, they share not only their subject matter – but, to a counter intuitively large degree, a faulty methodology.

As the renowned anti-psychiatrist, Thomas Szasz, of the State University of New York, notes in his article *"The Lying Truths of Psychiatry"*, mental health scholars, regardless of academic predilection, infer the etiology of mental disorders from the success or failure of treatment modalities.

This form of "reverse engineering" of scientific models is not unknown in other fields of science, nor is it unacceptable if the experiments meet the criteria of the scientific method. The theory must be all-inclusive (anamnetic), consistent, falsifiable, logically compatible, monovalent, and parsimonious. Psychological "theories" – even the "medical" ones (the role of serotonin and dopamine in mood disorders, for instance) – are usually none of these things.

The outcome is a bewildering array of ever-shifting mental health "diagnoses" expressly centred around Western civilisation and its standards (example: the ethical objection to suicide). Neurosis, a historically fundamental "condition" vanished after 1980. Homosexuality, according to the American Psychiatric Association, was a pathology prior to 1973. Seven years later, narcissism was declared a "personality disorder", almost seven decades after it was first described by Freud.

II. Personality Disorders

Indeed, personality disorders are an excellent example of the kaleidoscopic landscape of "objective" psychiatry.

The classification of Axis II personality disorders – deeply ingrained, maladaptive, lifelong behavior patterns – in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, fourth edition, text revision [American Psychiatric Association. DSM-IV-TR, Washington, 2000] – or the DSM-IV-TR for short – has come under sustained and serious criticism from its inception in 1952, in the first edition of the DSM.

The DSM IV-TR adopts a categorical approach, postulating that personality disorders are *"qualitatively distinct clinical syndromes"* (p. 689). This is widely doubted. Even the distinction made between "normal" and "disordered" personalities is increasingly being rejected. The "diagnostic thresholds" between normal and abnormal are either absent or weakly supported.

The polythetic form of the DSM's Diagnostic Criteria – only a subset of the criteria is adequate grounds for a diagnosis – generates unacceptable diagnostic heterogeneity. In other words, people diagnosed with the same personality disorder may share only one criterion or none.

The DSM fails to clarify the exact relationship between Axis II and Axis I disorders and the way chronic childhood and developmental problems interact with personality disorders.

The differential diagnoses are vague and the personality disorders are insufficiently demarcated. The result is excessive co-morbidity (multiple Axis II diagnoses).

The DSM contains little discussion of what distinguishes normal character (personality), personality traits, or personality style (Millon) – from personality disorders.

A dearth of documented clinical experience regarding both the disorders themselves and the utility of various treatment modalities.

Numerous personality disorders are "not otherwise specified" – a catchall, basket "category".

Cultural bias is evident in certain disorders (such as the Antisocial and the Schizotypal).

The emergence of dimensional alternatives to the categorical approach is acknowledged in the DSM-IV-TR itself:

“An alternative to the categorical approach is the dimensional perspective that Personality Disorders represent maladaptive variants of personality traits that merge imperceptibly into normality and into one another” (p.689)

The following issues – long neglected in the DSM – are likely to be tackled in future editions as well as in current research. But their omission from official discourse hitherto is both startling and telling:

- The longitudinal course of the disorder(s) and their temporal stability from early childhood onwards;
- The genetic and biological underpinnings of personality disorder(s);
- The development of personality psychopathology during childhood and its emergence in adolescence;
- The interactions between physical health and disease and personality disorders;
- The effectiveness of various treatments – talk therapies as well as psychopharmacology.

III. The Biochemistry and Genetics of Mental Health

Certain mental health afflictions are either correlated with a statistically abnormal biochemical activity in the brain – or are ameliorated with medication. Yet the two ***facts*** are not ineludibly facets of ***the same*** underlying phenomenon. In other words, that a given medicine reduces or abolishes certain symptoms does not necessarily mean they were ***caused*** by the processes or substances affected by the drug administered. Causation is only one of many possible connections and chains of events.

To designate a pattern of behavior as a mental health disorder is a value judgment, or at best a statistical observation. Such designation is effected regardless of the facts of brain science. Moreover, correlation is not causation. Deviant brain or body biochemistry (once called "polluted animal spirits") do exist – but are they truly the roots of mental perversion? Nor is it clear which triggers what: do the aberrant neurochemistry or biochemistry cause mental illness – or the other way around?

That psychoactive medication alters behavior and mood is indisputable. So do illicit and legal drugs, certain foods, and all interpersonal interactions. That the changes brought about by prescription are desirable – is debatable and involves tautological thinking. If a certain pattern of behavior is described as (socially) "dysfunctional" or (psychologically) "sick" – clearly, every change would be welcomed as "healing" and every agent of transformation would be called a "cure".

The same applies to the alleged heredity of mental illness. Single genes or gene complexes are frequently "associated" with mental health diagnoses, personality traits, or behavior patterns. But too little is known to establish irrefutable sequences of causes-and-effects. Even less is proven about the interaction of nature and nurture, genotype and phenotype, the plasticity of the brain and the psychological impact of trauma, abuse, upbringing, role models, peers, and other environmental elements.

Nor is the distinction between psychotropic substances and talk therapy that clear-cut. Words and the interaction with the therapist also affect the brain, its processes and chemistry - albeit more slowly and, perhaps, more profoundly and irreversibly. Medicines – as David Kaiser reminds us in *"Against Biologic Psychiatry"* (Psychiatric Times, Volume XIII, Issue 12, December 1996) – treat symptoms, not the underlying processes that yield them.

IV. The Variance of Mental Disease

If mental illnesses are bodily and empirical, they should be invariant both temporally and spatially, across cultures and societies. This, to some degree, is, indeed, the case. Psychological diseases are not context dependent – but the pathologizing of certain behaviors is. Suicide, substance abuse, narcissism, eating disorders, antisocial ways, schizotypal symptoms, depression, even psychosis are considered sick by some cultures – and utterly normative or advantageous in others.

This was to be expected. The human mind and its dysfunctions are alike around the world. But values differ from time to time and from one place to another. Hence, disagreements about the propriety and desirability of human actions and inaction are bound to arise in a symptom-based diagnostic system.

As long as the *pseudo-medical* definitions of mental health disorders continue to rely exclusively on signs and symptoms – i.e., mostly on observed or reported behaviors – they remain vulnerable to such discord and devoid of much-sought universality and rigor.

V. Mental Disorders and the Social Order

The mentally sick receive the same treatment as carriers of AIDS or SARS or the Ebola virus or smallpox. They are sometimes quarantined against their will and coerced into involuntary treatment by medication, psychosurgery, or electroconvulsive therapy. This is done in the name of the greater good, largely as a preventive policy.

Conspiracy theories notwithstanding, it is impossible to ignore the enormous interests vested in psychiatry and psychopharmacology. The multibillion dollar industries involving drug companies, hospitals, managed healthcare, private clinics, academic departments, and law enforcement agencies rely, for their continued and exponential growth, on the propagation of the concept of "mental illness" and its corollaries: treatment and research.

VI. Mental Ailment as a Useful Metaphor

Abstract concepts form the core of all branches of human knowledge. No one has ever seen a quark, or untangled a chemical bond, or surfed an electromagnetic wave, or visited the unconscious. These are useful metaphors, theoretical entities with explanatory or descriptive power.

"Mental health disorders" are no different. They are shorthand for capturing the unsettling quiddity of "the Other". Useful as taxonomies, they are also tools of social coercion and conformity, as Michel Foucault and [Louis Althusser](#) observed. Relegating both the dangerous and the idiosyncratic to the collective fringes is a vital technique of social engineering.

The aim is progress through social cohesion and the regulation of innovation and creative destruction. Psychiatry, therefore, is reifies society's preference of evolution to revolution, or, worse still, to mayhem. As is often the case with human Endeavour, it is a noble cause, unscrupulously and dogmatically pursued.

VII. The Insanity Defense

"It is an ill thing to knock against a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor. He that wounds them is culpable, but if they wound him they are not culpable." (Mishna, Babylonian Talmud)

If mental illness is culture-dependent and mostly serves as an organizing social principle - what should we make of the insanity defense (NGRI- Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity)?

A person is held not responsible for his criminal actions if s/he cannot tell right from wrong ("lacks substantial capacity either to appreciate the criminality (wrongfulness) of his conduct" - diminished capacity), did not intend to act the way he did (absent "mens rea") and/or could not control his behavior ("irresistible impulse"). These handicaps are often associated with "mental disease or defect" or "mental retardation".

Mental health professionals prefer to talk about an impairment of a ["person's perception or understanding of reality"](#). They hold a "guilty but mentally ill" verdict to be contradiction in terms. All "mentally-ill" people operate within a (usually coherent) worldview, with consistent internal logic, and rules of right and wrong (ethics). Yet, these rarely conform to the way most people perceive the world. The mentally-ill, therefore, cannot be guilty because s/he has a tenuous grasp on reality.

Yet, experience teaches us that a criminal maybe mentally ill even as s/he maintains a perfect reality test and thus is held criminally responsible (Jeffrey Dahmer comes to mind). The "perception and understanding of reality", in other words, can and does co-exist even with the severest forms of mental illness.

This makes it even more difficult to comprehend what is meant by "mental disease". If some mentally ill maintain a grasp on reality, know right from wrong, can anticipate the outcomes of their actions, are not subject to irresistible impulses (the official position of the American Psychiatric Association) - in what way do they differ from us, "normal" folks?

This is why the insanity defense often sits ill with mental health pathologies deemed socially "acceptable" and "normal" - such as religion or [love](#).

Consider the following case:

A mother bashes the skulls of her three sons. Two of them die. She claims to have acted on instructions she had received from God. She is found not guilty by reason of insanity. The jury determined that she ["did not know right from wrong during the killings."](#)

But why exactly was she judged insane?

Her belief in the existence of God - a being with inordinate and inhuman attributes - may be irrational.

But it does not constitute insanity in the strictest sense because it conforms to social and cultural creeds and codes of conduct in her milieu. Billions of people faithfully subscribe to the same ideas, adhere to the same transcendental rules, observe the same mystical rituals, and claim to go through the same experiences. This shared psychosis is so widespread that it can no longer be deemed pathological, statistically speaking.

She claimed that God has spoken to her.

As do numerous other people. Behavior that is considered psychotic (paranoid-schizophrenic) in other contexts is lauded and admired in religious circles. Hearing voices and seeing visions - auditory and visual delusions - are considered rank manifestations of righteousness and sanctity.

Perhaps it was the content of her hallucinations that proved her insane?

She claimed that God had instructed her to kill her boys. Surely, God would not ordain such evil?

Alas, the Old and New Testaments both contain examples of God's appetite for human sacrifice. Abraham was ordered by God to sacrifice Isaac, his beloved son (though this savage command was rescinded at the last moment). Jesus, the son of God himself, was crucified to atone for the sins of humanity.

A divine injunction to slay one's offspring would sit well with the Holy Scriptures and the Apocrypha as well as with millennia-old Judeo-Christian traditions of martyrdom and sacrifice.

Her actions were wrong and incommensurate with both human and divine (or natural) laws.

Yes, but they were perfectly in accord with a literal interpretation of certain divinely-inspired texts, millennial scriptures, apocalyptic thought systems, and fundamentalist religious ideologies (such as the ones espousing the imminence of "rupture"). Unless one declares these doctrines and writings insane, her actions are not.

we are forced to the conclusion that the murderous mother is perfectly sane. Her frame of reference is different to ours. Hence, her definitions of right and wrong are idiosyncratic. To her, killing her babies was the right thing to do and in conformity with valued teachings and her own epiphany. Her grasp of reality - the immediate and later consequences of her actions - was never impaired.

It would seem that sanity and insanity are relative terms, dependent on frames of cultural and social reference, and statistically defined. There isn't - and, in principle, can never emerge - an "objective", medical, scientific test to determine mental health or disease unequivocally.

VIII. Adaptation and Insanity - (correspondence with Paul Shirley, MSW)

"Normal" people adapt to their environment - both human and natural.

"Abnormal" ones try to adapt their environment - both human and natural - to their idiosyncratic needs/profile.

If they succeed, their environment, both human (society) and natural is pathologized.

Michael:

Group maladaptive responses are often misunderstood by the leaders and citizens of the developed societies, which do not have to contend with all-pervasive societal anxiety. These responses are often accorded the status of a political or religious doctrine, when in effect they are nothing more or less than expressions of a group psychopathology.

Sam:

As Freud observed, political or religious doctrines can be rooted in psychopathology - and exert powerful religious and political influence. That they are "sick" does not detract from their essence and potency as religious and political creeds.

Michael:

For the purposes of this dialog I will not introduce such variables as history, culture and customs, important as they are. Suffice it to note, that in my view, culture and customs, apart from the important function of ethnic identification, are a threefold phenomenon: they are a group attempt at environmental adaptation, the reduction of fear of the unknown and an introduction of the element of predictability into the chaos of life. All the components of this phenomenon could be said to serve the same purpose - the reduction of the levels of group anxiety.

Let me offer an illustration of the expression of differing levels of societal anxiety:

One of the highest accolades one can pay to another person in Australian society is to say: "Mr. So and So is so relaxed and laid-back!". In reality, the person paying this compliment is saying, "Mr. So and So is such a considerate man. He does not bother me with his anxiety," or, "I do not feel his anxiety, so I am not getting anxious myself". Furthermore, the calming presence of a "laid-back, relaxed person" is quite therapeutic for the anxious others, which is even more appreciated.

In traumatised societies this kind of consideration also exists but is as rare as hens' teeth. Public displays of emotion, aggression and anxiety are an accepted form of behavior. Conversely, in non-traumatised societies overt displays of emotions, which might be potentially harmful to others, are considered socially inappropriate. And, yes, anxiety is contagious. It does spread from person to person. It can affect groups.

I have decided to explore the psychodynamic as well as the political aspects of terrorist behavior using the referential framework, derived from the blending of my life's experiences and the knowledge I acquired as a psychiatrist in training. From a practical point of view, I believe that the knowledge of the mechanisms of group psychopathology might be helpful in devising successful strategies for the containment and rectification of critical situations.

Personal background and view from inside of prison

I was born in what used to be the USSR. As a part of our "free" education I, along with millions of my fellow students, had to study Marxist-Leninist theory and even had to pass exams in the knowledge of "the only correct system of philosophical thought in existence". We were isolated from the rest of the world, because of the "danger of the corrupt and decadent bourgeoisie, which was out to get our motherland one way or another". The only source of accredited information was the official propaganda. It depicted the world as a menacing, dark place, full of starving children, oppressed workers and mothers forced to be prostitutes in order to feed their families.

Despite an almost absolute lack of alternative sources of information, we did not believe the official propaganda. Moreover, when we saw crowds demonstrating against capitalism on the streets of Western cities in the official newsreels, we were reminded of the Lenin's definitions - "fellow-travelers" and the lesser known of his expressions - "useful idiots". Stalin, semi-contemptuously, called them "professional innocents".

We knew that the Western "peace" movements were active allies of our oppressors, that at best they were unthinking and naïve kids, believing or wanting to believe in the goodness of the "New World, a progressive future of the mankind". At worst they were in a hurry to jump on the winning wagon and dissociate themselves from the decaying and corrupt capitalist society, because this society was destined for a scrapheap of history as predicted by immortal Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. We did not know it at the time, but the motto "Better red, than dead" was quite popular.

We were angry with these movements, because of the ease with which they were manipulated by the Soviet secret services. It was an open secret in the USSR that the Chairman of the KGB was at the same time the Chairman of the International Association of the Democratic Youth, responsible for mass demonstrations in defense of peace. In their eagerness to proclaim their support for our tormentors these movements made our situation worse. They gave our rulers an impression that they are not going to be called to account for what they did to us, that nobody gave a damn about what has been done to the people living in the USSR. We lived in fear. We lived in a state of uncertainty and servitude; we were dreading a nightly knock on the door. We did not trust anyone and we were utterly dependent on the State for our livelihoods. We existed in fear all our lives - secret informers were at all levels of society.

As a result of a contemptuous expenditure of Soviet soldiers' lives during WWII, women made up the majority of the population, purges and back-breaking labour further diminished

male life expectancy. As a result of this tragic and brutal history, people living in Soviet society developed a range of maladaptive and enduring patterns of anti-social behavior, emotional vulnerability and seething anger. This anger was impossible to discharge other than in the State-sanctioned direction (Zionism, capitalism, America, Israel, yellow press, bourgeoisie decadence, rock-n-roll). Mass drunkenness was a commonplace. Interpersonal violence was widespread. Verbal aggression, insulting and rude behavior, disregard for the rights of others, petty thieving and shoddy work was a norm.

In short, we lived in totalitarian society. Dissent was outlawed. The Soviet rulers accepted the existence of Western liberal democracies as a temporary inconvenience to be terminated with extreme prejudice in a liberation war. Its (the West's) function was to supply the USSR and its allies (clients, really) with credits. Liberal democracies were expected to contribute to their own demise with the sale of technology, know-how and, above all - with injections of hard currency for the production of the weapons, directed against them. The isolation of the Soviet people from Western contacts was a political necessity to the Soviet elite. Free contacts would've quickly exposed how incompetent, corrupt and utterly contemptuous towards their own people the Soviet Nomenclature really was.

As a result of this paranoid-depressive position as well as for reasons of a dogma and feelings of inferiority, Soviets had no choice but to adopt an aggressive stance towards the West, despite their utter reliance on the West for almost everything, including bread. Unable to face reality, they utilised manic defenses:

Megalomania - our missiles are more powerful than yours, our ballet is more elegant than yours;

Paranoia - the West is out to get us, Jewish doctors are out to kill our government;

Triumphalism - we've won more gold medals than the Americans!

Denial - nobody was as good as the Soviets were in stonewalling, evasiveness and outright lying. The Soviet literature of the Socialist Realism was another example of a highly sophisticated form of denial.

Why did the dictatorship collapse?

One of the notable Soviet-era dissidents, Andrei Amalrik, wrote in the mid-sixties, what turned out to be a prophetic booklet, "Will the USSR still exist in 1984?". In this booklet, he stated his belief that the collapse of the USSR would happen in the vicinity of 1984. He was promptly given a 15-years sentence in a concentration camp for anti-Soviet activities and died soon after.

Interestingly, Andrei Amalrik stated that the post-Soviet era of recovery will be complicated by the popular Russian understanding of the philosophical category of "Justice". He noted that, in liberal societies, the word "justice" connotes an understanding that no one is allowed to starve and most people are able to reach a level of existence commensurate with his/her abilities. In the Russian interpretation, the word "justice" means - no one is allowed to have more than I do. The converse would mean "injustice".

While we are at it, here's another example of the Russian peculiarities of maladaptive interpretations. It goes like that: How would you distinguish between a Russian pessimist and optimist? A Russian pessimist is a man who does not believe that things can get any worse. A Russian optimist, on the other hand is a man who believes that things can get worse and significantly so at that.

So, why did this dictatorship collapse? It did not collapse because of its economic incompetence - it was always incompetent. Those who did not like it were made to help stabilise the economy by digging for gold in the concentration camps of Kolyma. It did not collapse because the Soviets were contemptuous towards their own people - they always were. Those who wanted to enhance their feelings of self-respect were made to undergo a crash course: digging for uranium in the concentration camps of Yellow Waters. It did not collapse because of a loss of the compact of trust between the Government and the governed - this compact never existed. Those who were indignant about the lack of trust could There were thousands of locations described in the well-researched tour guide to the Gulag Archipelago by A.Solzhenitzyn. Analysis of the constellation of reasons for the collapse of the USSR is best left to a professional political scientist. I speak from a beneficiary's point of view. The USSR collapsed, I believe, because it was publicly confronted and exposed by Ronald Reagan for what it was - a dictatorship, a totalitarian State, a chunk of prime real estate ruled by an illegitimate clique, bent on making a mischief around the world in order to safeguard and extend their power - in itself a maladaptive strategy. It collapsed, because the West refused to participate in its own "burial", so eloquently promised by Nikita Khrushchev at the memorable session of the General Assembly of the UN. The Western political will demonstrated that at long last the Soviet people had a powerful ally. This ally was quite open: the lack of political and economic freedoms in their country was regarded as a security threat to Western liberal democracies.

The Soviet population, not afraid of the mass terror of the Stalin era, exposed to the Western media and to personal accounts of the Soviet Jewish emigration simply laughed off attempts to salvage the remnants of regime's respectability. The fear was gone. The healing began. Besides, Western music and fashion were so much better than the Soviet ones.

Danger, inherent in a lack of freedom

Lack of freedom and impoverishment in failing or dysfunctional states, is an inevitable security threat towards the Western democracies. For totalitarian states and organisations, the confrontation with liberal democracy is not a matter of choice, but a matter of survival, a matter of propping up their sorely lacking legitimacy, a matter of asserting their political and economic competence, where there is none. Marxist doctrine provided a theoretical justification for the world revolution. Marx, a self-hating, angry and dependent man, clearly understood the impossibility of co-existence with the liberal democracies. For the Soviet Union and communism territorial expansion was a vital necessity - the elimination of any country its citizens would be able to defect to. Class war and the state of permanent revolution was a communist jihad. It divided the planet into a Socialist camp - an area of beauty and law, and a Capitalist camp - an area of ugliness and the law of the jungle. The mission - the creation of the World Communist Republic and the achievement of world peace (which is possible only when the entire world has become communist). We know how it ended.

Sam:

I hate to interrupt this eloquent expose (really! I am enjoying it greatly!) - but Western liberal-democracy is as missionary as socialism has ever been.

Stalin, actually, was AGAINST "internationalism" and coined the phrase "socialism in one state" (in Russia). He banished Trotsky because Trotsky sought to export the revolution to other countries!

Every dominant narrative - Communism, fascism, Islam, liberal-democracy - invents "enemies", develops a "we-against-they" mentality, and tries to export its ideology worldwide. What is the war in Iraq? What was the war in Kosovo? "Humanitarian" intervention is the code word for Western imposition of Western values by force of arms on (often unwilling) populations.

Consider the Huntingtonian pair in the "Clash of Civilization - Islam and Liberal-Democracy.

Islam is not merely a religion. It is also - and perhaps, foremost - a state ideology. It is all-pervasive and missionary. It permeates every aspect of social cooperation and culture. It is an organizing principle, a narrative, a philosophy, a value system, and a vade mecum. In this it resembles Confucianism and, to some extent, Hinduism.

Judaism and its offspring, Christianity - though heavily involved in political affairs throughout the ages - have kept their dignified distance from such carnal matters. These are religions of "heaven" as opposed to Islam, a practical, pragmatic, hands-on, ubiquitous, "earthly" creed.

Secular religions - Democratic Liberalism, Communism, Fascism, Nazism, Socialism and other isms - are more akin to Islam than to, let's say, Buddhism. They are universal, prescriptive, and total. They provide recipes, rules, and norms regarding every aspect of existence - individual, social, cultural, moral, economic, political, military, and philosophical.

At the end of the Cold War, Democratic Liberalism stood triumphant over the fresh graves of its ideological opponents. They have all been eradicated. This precipitated Fukuyama's premature diagnosis (the End of History). But one state ideology, one bitter rival, one implacable opponent, one contestant for world domination, one antithesis remained - Islam.

Militant Islam is, therefore, not a cancerous mutation of "true" Islam. On the contrary, it is the purest expression of its nature as an imperialistic religion which demands unmitigated obedience from its followers and regards all infidels as both inferior and avowed enemies.

The same can be said about Democratic Liberalism. Like Islam, it does not hesitate to exercise force, is missionary, colonizing, and regards itself as a monopolist of the "truth" and of "universal values". Its antagonists are invariably portrayed as depraved, primitive, and below par.

Such mutually exclusive claims were bound to lead to an all-out conflict sooner or later. The "War on Terrorism" is only the latest round in a millennium-old war between Islam and other "world systems".

Such interpretation of recent events enrages many. They demand to know (often in harsh tones):

- Don't you see any difference between terrorists who murder civilians and regular armies in battle?

Both regulars and irregulars slaughter civilians as a matter of course. "Collateral damage" is the main outcome of modern, total warfare - and of low intensity conflicts alike.

There is a major difference between terrorists and soldiers, though:

Terrorists make carnage of noncombatants their main tactic - while regular armies rarely do. Such conduct is criminal and deplorable, whoever the perpetrator.

But what about the killing of combatants in battle? How should we judge the slaying of soldiers by terrorists in combat?

Modern nation-states enshrined the self-appropriated monopoly on violence in their constitutions and ordinances (and in international law). Only state organs - the army, the police - are permitted to kill, torture, and incarcerate.

Terrorists are trust-busters: they, too, want to kill, torture, and incarcerate. They seek to break the death cartel of governments by joining its ranks.

Thus, when a soldier kills terrorists and ("inadvertently") civilians (as "collateral damage") - it is considered above board. But when the terrorist decimates the very same soldier - he is decied as an outlaw.

Moreover, the misbehavior of some countries - not least the United States - led to the legitimization of terrorism. Often nation-states use terrorist organizations to further their geopolitical goals. When this happens, erstwhile outcasts become "freedom fighters", pariahs become allies, murderers are recast as sensitive souls struggling for equal rights. This contributes to the blurring of ethical percepts and the blunting of moral judgment.

- Would you rather live under sharia law? Don't you find Liberal Democracy vastly superior to Islam?

Superior, no. Different - of course. Having been born and raised in the West, I naturally prefer its standards to Islam's. Had I been born in a Muslim country, I would have probably found the West and its principles perverted and obnoxious.

The question is meaningless because it presupposes the existence of an objective, universal, culture and period independent set of preferences. Luckily, there is no such thing.

- In this clash of civilization whose side are you on?

This is not a clash of civilizations. Western culture is inextricably intertwined with Islamic knowledge, teachings, and philosophy. Christian fundamentalists have more in common with Muslim militants than with East Coast or French intellectuals.

Muslims have always been the West's most defining Other. Islamic existence and "gaze" helped to mold the West's emerging identity as a historical construct. From Spain to India, the

incessant friction and fertilizing interactions with Islam shaped Western values, beliefs, doctrines, moral tenets, political and military institutions, arts, and sciences.

This war is about world domination. Two incompatible thought and value systems compete for the hearts and minds (and purchasing power) of the denizens of the global village. Like in the Westens, by high noon, either one of them is left standing - or both will have perished.

Where does my loyalty reside?

I am a Westerner, so I hope the West wins this confrontation. But, in the process, it would be good if it were humbled, deconstructed, and reconstructed. One beneficial outcome of this conflict is the demise of the superpower system - a relic of days bygone and best forgotten. I fully believe and trust that in militant Islam, the United States has found its match.

In other words, I regard militant Islam as a catalyst that will hasten the transformation of the global power structure from unipolar to multipolar. It may also commute the United States itself. It will definitely rejuvenate religious thought and cultural discourse. All wars do.

Aren't you overdoing it? After all, al-Qaida is just a bunch of terrorists on the run!

The West is not fighting al-Qaida. It is facing down the circumstances and ideas that gave rise to al-Qaida. Conditions - such as poverty, ignorance, disease, oppression, and xenophobic superstitions - are difficult to change or to reverse. Ideas are impossible to suppress. Already, militant Islam is far more widespread and established than any Western government would care to admit.

History shows that all terrorist groupings ultimately join the mainstream. Many countries - from Israel to Ireland and from East Timor to Nicaragua - are governed by former terrorists. Terrorism enhances social upward mobility and fosters the redistribution of wealth and resources from the haves to have not.

Al-Qaida, despite its ominous portrayal in the Western press - is no exception. It, too, will succumb, in due time, to the twin lures of power and money. Nihilistic and decentralized as it is - its express goals are the rule of Islam and equitable economic development. It is bound to get its way in some countries.

The world of the future will be truly pluralistic. The proselytizing zeal of Liberal Democracy and Capitalism has rendered them illiberal and intolerant. The West must accept the fact that a sizable chunk of humanity does not regard materialism, individualism, liberalism, progress, and democracy - at least in their Western guises - as universal or desirable.

Live and let live (and live and let die) must replace the West's malignant optimism and intellectual and spiritual arrogance.

Edward K. Thompson, the managing editor of "Life" from 1949 to 1961, once wrote:

"'Life' must be curious, alert, erudite and moral, but it must achieve this without being holier-than-thou, a cynic, a know-it-all or a Peeping Tom."

The West has grossly and thoroughly violated Thompson's edict. In its oft-interrupted intercourse with these forsaken regions of the globe, it has acted, alternately, as a Peeping Tom, a cynic and a know it all. It has invariably behaved as if it were holier-than-thou. In an unmitigated and fantastic succession of blunders, miscalculations, vain promises, unkept threats and unkempt diplomats - it has driven the world to the verge of war and the regions it "adopted" to the threshold of economic and social upheaval.

Enamored with the new ideology of free marketry cum democracy, the West first assumed the role of the omniscient. It designed ingenious models, devised foolproof laws, imposed fail-safe institutions and strongly "recommended" measures. Its representatives, the tribunes of the West, ruled the plebeian East with determination rarely equaled by skill or knowledge.

Velvet hands couched in iron gloves, ignorance disguised by economic newspeak, geostrategic interests masquerading as forms of government, characterized their dealings with the natives. Preaching and beseeching from ever higher pulpits, they poured opprobrium and sweet delusions on the eagerly duped, naive, bewildered masses.

The deceit was evident to the indigenous cynics - but it was the failure that dissuaded them and others besides. The West lost its former colonies not when it lied egregiously, not when it pretended to know for sure when it surely did not know, not when it manipulated and coaxed and coerced - but when it failed.

To the peoples of these regions, the king was fully dressed. It was not a little child but an enormous debacle that exposed his nudity. In its presumptuousness and pretentiousness, feigned surety and vain clichés, imported economic models and exported cheap raw materials - the West succeeded to demolish beyond reconstruction whole economies, to ravage communities, to wreak ruination upon the centuries-old social fabric, woven diligently by generations.

It brought crime and drugs and mayhem but gave very little in return, only a horizon beclouded and thundering with vacuous eloquence. As a result, while tottering regional governments still pay lip service to the values of Capitalism, the masses are enraged and restless and rebellious and baleful and anti-Western to the core.

The disenchanted were not likely to acquiesce for long - not only with the West's neo-colonialism but also with its incompetence and inaptitude, with the nonchalant experimentation that it imposed upon them and with the abyss between its proclamations and its performance.

Throughout this time, the envoys of the West - its mediocre politicians, its insatiably ruthless media, its obese tourists, its illiterate soldiers, and its armchair economists - continue to play the role of God, wreaking greater havoc than even the original.

While confessing to omniscience (in breach of every tradition scientific and religious), they also developed a kind of world weary, unshaven cynicism interlaced with fascination at the depths plumbed by the locals' immorality and amorality.

The jet-set Peeping Toms reside in five star hotels (or luxurious apartments) overlooking the communist, or Middle-Eastern, or African shantytowns. They drive utility vehicles to the

shabby offices of the native bureaucrats and dine in \$100 per meal restaurants ("it's so cheap here").

In between kebab and hummus they bemoan and grieve the corruption and nepotism and cronyism ("I simply love their ethnic food, but they are so..."). They mourn the autochthonous inability to act decisively, to cut red tape, to manufacture quality, to open to the world, to be less xenophobic (said while casting a disdainful glance at the native waiter).

To them it looks like an ancient force of nature and, therefore, an inevitability - hence their cynicism. Mostly provincial people with horizons limited by consumption and by wealth, these heralds of the West adopt cynicism as shorthand for cosmopolitanism. They erroneously believe that feigned sarcasm lends them an air of ruggedness and rich experience and the virile aroma of decadent erudition. Yet all it does is make them obnoxious and even more repellent to the residents than they already were.

Ever the preachers, the West - both Europeans and Americans - uphold themselves as role models of virtue to be emulated, as points of reference, almost inhuman or superhuman in their taming of the vices, avarice up front.

Yet the chaos and corruption in their own homes is broadcast live, day in and day out, into the cubicles inhabited by the very people they seek to so transform. And they conspire and collaborate in all manner of venality and crime and scam and rigged elections in all the countries they put the gospel to.

In trying to put an end to history, they seem to have provoked another round of it - more vicious, more enduring, more traumatic than before. That the West is paying the price for its mistakes I have no doubt. For isn't it a part and parcel of its teachings that everything has a price and that there is always a time of reckoning?

Regarding Communism:

The core countries of Central Europe (the Czech Republic, Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Poland) experienced industrial capitalism in the inter-war period. But the countries comprising the vast expanses of the New Independent States, Russia and the Balkan had no real acquaintance with it. To them its zealous introduction is nothing but another ideological experiment and not a very rewarding one at that.

It is often said that there is no precedent to the extant fortuitous transition from totalitarian communism to liberal capitalism. This might well be true. Yet, nascent capitalism is not without historical example. The study of the birth of capitalism in feudal Europe may yet lead to some surprising and potentially useful insights.

The Barbarian conquest of the teetering Roman Empire (410-476 AD) heralded five centuries of existential insecurity and mayhem. Feudalism was the countryside's reaction to this damnation. It was a Hobson's choice and an explicit trade-off. Local lords defended their vassals against nomad intrusions in return for perpetual service bordering on slavery. A small percentage of the population lived on trade behind the massive walls of Medieval cities.

In most parts of central, eastern and southeastern Europe, feudalism endured well into the twentieth century. It was entrenched in the legal systems of the Ottoman Empire and of

Czarist Russia. Elements of feudalism survived in the mellifluous and prolix prose of the Habsburg codices and patents. Most of the denizens of these moribund swathes of Europe were farmers - only the profligate and parasitic members of a distinct minority inhabited the cities. The present brobdignagian agricultural sectors in countries as diverse as Poland and Macedonia attest to this continuity of feudal practices.

Both manual labour and trade were derided in the Ancient World. This derision was partially eroded during the Dark Ages. It survived only in relation to trade and other "non-productive" financial activities and even that not past the thirteenth century. Max Weber, in his opus, "The City" (New York, MacMillan, 1958) described this mental shift of paradigm thus: "The medieval citizen was on the way towards becoming an economic man ... the ancient citizen was a political man."

What communism did to the lands it permeated was to freeze this early feudal frame of mind of disdain towards "non-productive", "city-based" vocations. Agricultural and industrial occupations were romantically extolled. The cities were berated as hubs of moral turpitude, decadence and greed. Political awareness was made a precondition for personal survival and advancement. The clock was turned back. Weber's "Homo Economicus" yielded to communism's supercilious version of the ancient Greeks' "Zoon Politikon". John of Salisbury might as well have been writing for a communist agitprop department when he penned this in "Policraticus" (1159 AD): "...if (rich people, people with private property) have been stuffed through excessive greed and if they hold in their contents too obstinately, (they) give rise to countless and incurable illnesses and, through their vices, can bring about the ruin of the body as a whole". The body in the text being the body politic.

This inimical attitude should have come as no surprise to students of either urban realities or of communism, their parricidal off-spring. The city liberated its citizens from the bondage of the feudal labour contract. And it acted as the supreme guarantor of the rights of private property. It relied on its trading and economic prowess to obtain and secure political autonomy. John of Paris, arguably one of the first capitalist cities (at least according to Braudel), wrote: "(The individual) had a right to property which was not with impunity to be interfered with by superior authority - because it was acquired by (his) own efforts" (in Georges Duby, "The age of the Cathedrals: Art and Society, 980-1420, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1981). Despite the fact that communism was an urban phenomenon (albeit with rustic roots) - it abnegated these "bourgeoisie" values. Communal ownership replaced individual property and servitude to the state replaced individualism. In communism, feudalism was restored. Even geographical mobility was severely curtailed, as was the case in feudalism. The doctrine of the Communist party monopolized all modes of thought and perception - very much as the church-condoned religious strain did 700 years before. Communism was characterized by tensions between party, state and the economy - exactly as the medieval polity was plagued by conflicts between church, king and merchants-bankers. Paradoxically, communism was a faithful re-enactment of pre-capitalist history.

Communism should be well distinguished from Marxism. Still, it is ironic that even Marx's "scientific materialism" has an equivalent in the twilight times of feudalism. The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed a concerted effort by medieval scholars to apply "scientific" principles and human knowledge to the solution of social problems. The historian R. W. Southern called this period "scientific humanism" (in "Flesh and Stone" by Richard Sennett, London, Faber and Faber, 1994). We mentioned John of Salisbury's "Policraticus". It was an effort to map political functions and interactions into their human physiological equivalents.

The king, for instance, was the brain of the body politic. Merchants and bankers were the insatiable stomach. But this apparently simplistic analogy masked a schismatic debate. Should a person's position in life be determined by his political affiliation and "natural" place in the order of things - or should it be the result of his capacities and their exercise (merit)? Do the ever changing contents of the economic "stomach", its kaleidoscopic innovativeness, its "permanent revolution" and its propensity to assume "irrational" risks - adversely affect this natural order which, after all, is based on tradition and routine? In short: is there an inherent incompatibility between the order of the world (read: the church doctrine) and meritocratic (democratic) capitalism? Could Thomas Aquinas' "Summa Theologica" (the world as the body of Christ) be reconciled with "Stadt Luft Macht Frei" ("city air liberates" - the sign above the gates of the cities of the Hanseatic League)?

This is the eternal tension between the individual and the group. Individualism and communism are not new to history and they have always been in conflict. To compare the communist party to the church is a well-worn cliché. Both religions - the secular and the divine - were threatened by the spirit of freedom and initiative embodied in urban culture, commerce and finance. The order they sought to establish, propagate and perpetuate conflicted with basic human drives and desires. Communism was a throwback to the days before the ascent of the urbane, capitalistic, sophisticated, incredulous, individualistic and risqué West. It sought to substitute one kind of "scientific" determinism (the body politic of Christ) by another (the body politic of "the Proletariat"). It failed and when it unraveled, it revealed a landscape of toxic devastation, frozen in time, an ossified natural order bereft of content and adherents. The post-communist countries have to pick up where it left them, centuries ago. It is not so much a problem of lacking infrastructure as it is an issue of pathologized minds, not so much a matter of the body as a dysfunction of the psyche.

The historian Walter Ullman says that John of Salisbury thought (850 years ago) that "the individual's standing within society... (should be) based upon his office or his official function ... (the greater this function was) the more scope it had, the weightier it was, the more rights the individual had." (Walter Ullman, "The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages", Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966). I cannot conceive of a member of the communist nomenklatura who would not have adopted this formula wholeheartedly. If modern capitalism can be described as "back to the future", communism was surely "forward to the past".

Michael:

Still, compare Communism with the Islamic interpretation. For radical Islamists the justification for territorial expansion is provided by the principle of Jihad, established by Mohammed in response to the refusal to acknowledge his prophetic mission by the Jewish tribes of Hijaz. He divided the world into the dar al-Islam, the peaceful territory of Islam, where the Law rules and dar al-Harb, the "territory of war", controlled temporarily by non-Muslims.

Sam:

Sounds to me like the division offered by the democratic states (Israel, the USA, the UK) today:

Liberal-democracy pitted against the "Evil Empire" (USSR), or the "Axis of Evil" (North Korea, Iran, and Iraq).

We-against-they. Every regime must find an enemy - or, in the absence of one, invent it. Read Orwell's "1984".

Michael:

But Jihad is the *necessary and permanent* state of war waged against the dar al-Harb, which can only end when the entire world submits to Islam. The similarities between the secular totalitarian dogma of communism and the monotheistic Islam are remarkable.

Sam:

Jihad is the continuous fight to achieve perfection. It can - and does - take place within each and every individual Muslim. It is a striving, a state of mind, not necessarily an act. Politically, it is the war against "infidels" who harm Muslims, violate their rights, and act against the interests of Islam. Jihad is reactive - not proactive. It is not missionary - it is intended to right wrongs (or what Muslims perceive to be wrongs).

Michael:

So, why terror? What has it got to do with the psychodynamic approach? Terrorism actually is not a new doctrine. Looking back at recent history, we find Russian terrorists of the Peoples' freedom, Jewish terrorists of the Stern gang, Serbian terrorists such as Danilo Princip whose shots in Sarajevo triggered WWI, the Arab terrorists of Hamas and Hizbullah, the Palestinian terrorists of Al-Fatah, the Tamil terrorists or Tigers, Irish terrorists in the IRA and many others. Should Attila the Hun or Robin Hood be called terrorists?

Semantics could be quite confusing. What is terrorism? Being a planetary phenomenon terrorism could be defined as an application of unconventional, unexpected and illegal power designed to achieve political goals.

Sam:

"'Unbounded' morality ultimately becomes counterproductive even in terms of the same moral principles being sought. The law of diminishing returns applies to morality."

Thomas Sowell

There's a story about Robespierre that has the preeminent rabble-rouser of the French Revolution leaping up from his chair as soon as he saw a mob assembling outside.

"I must see which way the crowd is headed", he is reputed to have said: "For I am their leader."

http://www.salon.com/tech/books/1999/11/04/new_optimism/

People who exercise violence in the pursuit of what they hold to be just causes are alternately known as "terrorists" or "freedom fighters".

They all share a few common characteristics:

1. A hard core of idealists adopt a cause (in most cases, the freedom of a group of people). They base their claims on history - real or hastily concocted, on a common heritage, on a language shared by the members of the group and, most important, on hate and contempt directed at an "enemy". The latter is, almost invariably, the physical or cultural occupier of space the idealists claim as their own.
2. The loyalties and alliances of these people shift effortlessly as ever escalating means justify an ever shrinking cause. The initial burst of grandiosity inherent in every such undertaking gives way to cynical and bitter pragmatism as both enemy and people tire of the conflict.
3. An inevitable result of the realpolitik of terrorism is the collaboration with the less savory elements of society. Relegated to the fringes by the inexorable march of common sense, the freedom fighters naturally gravitate towards like minded non-conformists and outcasts. The organization is criminalized. Drug dealing, bank robbing and other manner of organized and contumacious criminality become integral extensions of the struggle. A criminal corporatism emerges, structured but volatile and given to internecine donnybrooks.
4. Very often an un-holy co-dependence develops between the organization and its prey. It is the interest of the freedom fighters to have a contemptible and tyrannical regime as their opponent. If not prone to suppression and convulsive massacres by nature - acts of terror will deliberately provoke even the most benign rule to abhorrent ebullition.
5. The terrorist organization will tend to emulate the very characteristics of its enemy it fulminates against the most. Thus, all such groups are rebarbatively authoritarian, execrably violent, devoid of human empathy or emotions, suppressive, ostentatious, trenchant and often murderous.
6. It is often the freedom fighters who compromise their freedom and the freedom of their people in the most egregious manner. This is usually done either by collaborating with the derided enemy against another, competing set of freedom fighters - or by inviting a foreign power to arbiter. Thus, they often catalyse the replacement of one regime of oppressive horror with another, more terrible and entrenched.
7. Most freedom fighters are assimilated and digested by the very establishment they fought against or as the founders of new, privileged nomenklaturas. It is then that their true nature is exposed, mired in gulosity and superciliousness as they become. Inveterate violators of basic human rights, they often transform into the very demons they helped to exorcise.

Most freedom fighters are disgruntled members of the middle classes or the intelligentsia. They bring to their affairs the merciless ruthlessness of sheltered lives. Mistaking compassion for weakness, they show none as they unscrupulously pursue their self-aggrandizement, the ego trip of sending others to their death. They are the stuff martyrs are made of. Borne on the crests of circumstantial waves, they lever their unbalanced personalities and project them to great effect. They are the footnotes of history that assume the role of text. And they rarely enjoy the unmitigated support of the very people they proffer to liberate. Even the most

harangued and subjugated people find it hard to follow or accept the vicissitudinal behavior of their self-appointed liberators, their shifting friendships and enmities and their passivity of violence.

Terrorists can be phenomenologically described as narcissists in a constant state of deficient narcissistic supply. The "grandiosity gap" - the painful and narcissistically injurious gap between their grandiose fantasies and their dreary and humiliating reality - becomes emotionally insupportable. They decompensate and act out. They bring "down to their level" (by destroying it) the object of their pathological envy, the cause of their seething frustration, the symbol of their dull achievements, always incommensurate with their inflated self-image.

They seek omnipotence through murder, control (not least self control) through violence, prestige, fame and celebrity by defying figures of authorities, challenging them, and humbling them. Unbeknownst to them, they seek self punishment. They are at heart suicidal. They aim to cast themselves as victims by forcing others to punish them. This is called "projective identification". They attribute evil and corruption to their enemies and foes. These forms of paranoia are called projection and splitting. These are all primitive, infantile, and often persecutory, defense mechanisms.

When coupled with narcissism - the inability to empathize, the exploitativeness, the sense of entitlement, the rages, the dehumanization and devaluation of others - this mindset yields abysmal contempt. The overriding emotion of terrorists and serial killers, the amalgam and culmination of their tortured psyche - is deep seated disdain for everything human, the flip side of envy. It is cognitive dissonance gone amok. On the one hand the terrorist derides as "false", "meaningless", "dangerous", and "corrupt" common values, institutions, human intercourse, and society. On the other hand, he devotes his entire life (and often risks it) to the elimination and pulverization of these "insignificant" entities. To justify this apparent contradiction, the terrorists casts himself as an altruistic saviour of a group of people "endangered" by his foes. He is always self-appointed and self-proclaimed, rarely elected. The serial killer rationalizes and intellectualizes his murders similarly, by purporting to "liberate" or "deliver" his victims from a fate worse than death.

The global reach, the secrecy, the impotence and growing panic of his victims, of the public, and of his pursuers, the damage he wreaks - all serve as external ego functions. The terrorist and serial killer regulate their sense of self esteem and self worth by feeding slavishly on the reactions to their heinous deeds. Their cosmic significance is daily enhanced by newspaper headlines, ever increasing bounties, admiring imitators, successful acts of blackmail, the strength and size of their opponents, and the devastation of human life and property. Appeasement works only to aggravate their drives and strengthen their appetites by emboldening them and by raising the threshold of excitation and "narcissistic supply". Terrorists and killers are addicted to this drug of being acknowledged and reflected. They derive their sense of existence, parasitically, from the reactions of their (often captive) audience.

See this:

[*Pathological Narcissism, Group Behavior, and Terrorism*](#)

Michael:

From a psychodynamic view, however, terrorism is one of the results of the inherent insecurity of the totalitarian mind; its claim to significance, an attempt to publicly declare perceived suffering, thus justifying the right to inflict suffering in return. Being inspired by whatever grievances the terrorist wants rectified, he uses a simple reframing technique: dehumanizing the opposition. Labeling all non-Moslems as 'infidels' he gives and receives permission to use whatever force he deems necessary to win.

Curiously, in the context of the ongoing conflict between the terrorist and the rest of the civilized world there might be an element of a dependent child, angrily hitting daddy who holds him, to indicate the distress he feels.

Sam:

Objectifying (and, thus, dehumanizing) language is used by all political regimes and institutions, terrorist or not.

What is "collateral damage" if not an objectifying, dehumanizing form of speech?

The Anglo-Saxon members of the motley "Coalition of the Willing" were proud of their aircraft's and missiles' "surgical" precision. The legal (and moral) imperative to spare the lives of innocent civilians was well observed, they bragged. "Collateral damage" was minimized. They were lucky to have confronted a dilapidated enemy. Precision bombing is expensive, in terms of lives - of fighter pilots. Military planners are well aware that there is a hushed trade-off between civilian and combatant casualties.

This dilemma is both ethical and practical. It is often "resolved" by applying - explicitly or implicitly - the principle of "over-riding affiliation". As usual, Judaism was there first, agonizing over similar moral conflicts. Two Jewish sayings amount to a reluctant admission of the relativity of moral calculus: "One is close to oneself" and "Your city's poor denizens come first (with regards to charity)".

One's *proper* conduct, in other words, is decided by one's self-interest and by one's affiliations. Affiliation (to a community, or a fraternity), in turn, is determined by one's positions and, more so, perhaps, by one's oppositions.

What are these "positions" and "oppositions"?

The most fundamental position - from which all others are derived - is the positive statement "I am a human being". Belonging to the human race is an immutable and inalienable position. Denying this leads to horrors such as the Holocaust. The Nazis did not regard as humans the Jews, the Slavs, homosexuals, and other minorities - so they sought to exterminate them.

All other, synthetic, positions are made of couples of positive and negative statements with the structure "I am *and* I am not".

But there is an important asymmetry at the heart of this neat arrangement.

The negative statements in each couple are fully derived from - and thus are entirely dependent on and implied by - the positive statements. Not so the positive statements. They cannot be derived from, or be implied by, the negative one.

Lest we get distractingly abstract, let us consider an example.

Study the couple "I am an Israeli" and "I am not a Syrian".

Assuming that there are 220 countries and territories, the positive statement "I am an Israeli" implies about 220 **certain** (true) negative statements. You can derive each and every one of these negative statements from the positive statement. You can thus create 220 perfectly valid couples.

"I am an Israeli ..."

Therefore:

"I am not ... (a citizen of country X, which is not Israel)".

You can safely derive the true statement "I am not a Syrian" from the statement "I am an Israeli".

Can I derive the statement "I am an Israeli" from the statement "I am not a Syrian"?

Not with any certainty.

The negative statement "I am not a Syrian" implies 220 **possible** positive statements of the type "I am ... (a citizen of country X, which is not India)", including the statement "I am an Israeli". "I am not a Syrian and I am a citizen of ... (220 possibilities)"

Negative statements can be derived with certainty from any positive statement.

Negative statements as well as positive statements cannot be derived with certainty from any negative statement.

This formal-logical trait reflects a deep psychological reality with unsettling consequences.

A positive statement about one's affiliation ("I am an Israeli") immediately generates 220 certain **negative** statements (such as "I am not a Syrian").

One's positive self-definition automatically excludes all others by assigning to them negative values. **"I am"** always goes with **"I am not"**.

The positive self-definitions of others, in turn, negate one's self-definition.

Statements about one's affiliation are inevitably exclusionary.

It is possible for many people to share the same positive self-definition. About 6 million people can truly say "I am an Israeli".

Affiliation - to a community, fraternity, nation, state, religion, or team - is really a positive statement of self-definition ("I am an Israeli", for instance) shared by all the affiliated members (the affiliates).

One's moral obligations towards one's affiliates override and supersede one's moral obligations towards non-affiliated humans.

Thus, an American's moral obligation to safeguard the lives of American fighter pilots overrides and supersedes (subordinates) his moral obligation to save the lives of innocent civilians, however numerous, if they are not Americans.

The larger the number of positive self-definitions I share with someone (i.e., the more affiliations we have in common) , the larger and more overriding is my moral obligation to him or her.

Example:

I have moral obligations towards all other humans because I share with them my affiliation to the human species.

But my moral obligations towards my countrymen supersede these obligation. I share with my compatriots two affiliations rather than one. We are all members of the human race - but we are also citizens of the same state.

This patriotism, in turn, is superseded by my moral obligation towards the members of my family. With them I share a third affiliation - we are all members of the same clan.

I owe the utmost to myself. With myself I share all the aforementioned affiliations plus one: the affiliation to the one member club that is me.

But this scheme raises some difficulties.

We postulated that the strength of one's moral obligations towards other people is determined by the number of positive self-definitions ("affiliations") he shares with them.

Moral obligations are, therefore, contingent. They are, indeed, the outcomes of interactions with others - but not in the immediate sense, as the personalist philosopher Emmanuel Levinas suggested.

Rather, ethical principles, rights, and obligations are merely the solutions yielded by a moral calculus of shared affiliations. Think about them as matrices with specific moral values and obligations attached to the numerical strengths of one's affiliations.

Some moral obligations are universal and are the outcomes of one's organic position as a human being (the "basic affiliation"). These are the "transcendent moral values".

Other moral values and obligations arise only as the number of shared affiliations increases. These are the "derivative moral values".

Moreover, it would wrong to say that moral values and obligations "accumulate", or that the more fundamental ones are the strongest.

On the very contrary. The universal ethical principles - the ones related to one's position as a human being - are the *weakest*. They are subordinate to derivative moral values and obligations yielded by one's affiliations.

The universal imperative "thou shall not kill (another human being)" is easily over-ruled by the moral obligation to kill for one's country. The imperative "thou shall not steal" is superseded by one's moral obligation to spy for one's nation. Treason is when we prefer universal ethical principles to derivatives ones, dictated by our affiliation (citizenship).

This leads to another startling conclusion:

There is no such thing as a self-consistent moral system. Moral values and obligations often contradict and conflict with each other.

In the examples above, killing (for one's country) and stealing (for one's nation) are moral obligations, the outcomes of the application of derivative moral values. Yet, they contradict the universal moral value of the sanctity of life and property and the universal moral obligation not to kill.

Hence, killing the non-affiliated (civilians of another country) to defend one's own (fighter pilots) is morally justified. It violates some fundamental principles - but upholds higher moral obligations, to one's kin and kith.

The truth is that in an age of terrorism, guerilla and total warfare the medieval doctrine of Just War needs to be re-defined. Moreover, issues of legitimacy, efficacy and morality should not be confused. Legitimacy is conferred by institutions. Not all morally justified wars are, therefore, automatically legitimate. Frequently the efficient execution of a battle plan involves immoral or even illegal acts.

As international law evolves beyond the ancient percepts of sovereignty, it should incorporate new thinking about pre-emptive strikes, human rights violations as casus belli and the role and standing of international organizations, insurgents and liberation movements.

Yet, inevitably, what constitutes "justice" depends heavily on the cultural and societal contexts, narratives, mores, and values of the disputants. Thus, one cannot answer the deceptively simple question: "Is this war a just war?" - without first asking: "According to whom? In which context? By which criteria? Based on what values? In which period in history and where?"

Being members of Western Civilization, whether by choice or by default, our understanding of what constitutes a just war is crucially founded on our shifting perceptions of the West.

See these:

[*Hitler and the Invention of the West*](#)

[*The Demise of the West?*](#)

[*The New Rome - America, the Reluctant Empire*](#)

The Doctrine of Just War

Michael:

There is also an attempt to level the playing field by destabilizing the economies and political structures of the West in order to bring the Western democracies to a lower level of 'functioning'. The superior functioning of Western societies has unacceptable implications to the terrorist. One of these implications is a lower level of societal anxiety. "How could you be so calm, when I am hurting?!". The conflict between high and low group anxiety societies is inevitable where the rulers or aspirants to this title claim a messianic mantle with nothing to show in tangible benefits for the people they claim to emancipate. Stalin blamed "wreckers" for his failures, Osama bin Laden is blaming the West for the squalor in which his people live. One of the most dangerous features of the totalitarian mind is a total lack of insight coupled with messianic aspirations on the background of narcissism.

He has to have an enemy, someone who is responsible for the fact that his chosen path to nirvana for the masses has led to personal disappointment, embarrassment and universal poverty. Narcissistic lack of empathy and anti-social disregard of the rights and aspirations of others means that these self-proclaimed Messiahs have no problem with deaths of the others, be it their own people or not.

Western fellow travelers

When I started to practice in Australia in early 1980's my mentor invited me to come along to the meeting of the local branch of PND (People for Nuclear Disarmament) and was very surprised that I declined. As a matter of fact he was shocked: "Are you supporting nuclear war?". I could've told him that I came from a country where there was no family that did not lose someone in the fight against the Nazis, that for me to support any war is a sheer impossibility, but I also did not feel like social suicide. However, I did not want to offend an essentially well-meaning man, so instead I explained, that I will take part in the activities of the PND immediately after a branch of this organisation (or its Soviet equivalent) will be allowed free and unfettered right of assembly in Moscow and other cities of the Soviet Union. I find it hard to forget how smug and self-righteous, how indignant and hostile he was towards "reactionaries". He really believed, that the reactionaries were anyone who did not think, that the Liberals (the Australian equivalent of American Republicans) were fascists. There was not a hint of tolerance or respect for a difference in opinion. This encounter with an otherwise sane and decent man profoundly shocked me. This was the first time, since leaving the USSR I came across the hold the Left had on hearts and minds of the Australian intelligentsia.

Many years later I attended a seminar dedicated to the topic of terrorism as a psychodynamic phenomenon. It was designed primarily for psychiatric registrars and was addressed by one of the prominent members of psychotherapeutic community. This esteemed academic left no one in any doubt, that terrorism, especially the 9/11 events, were prompted, indeed provoked by, American arrogance, its narcissistic view of itself and its inherent insensitivity to the values, hopes and aspirations of others. The audience was assured that the true cause of terrorism was the American status of overwhelming success and American failure to be empathic towards the suffering of others. In order to deceive the masses, we were told, the American oligarchy uses manic defenses. The delivery was not dissimilar to the lecture on the same topic, given by Hanna Segal, of the British Psychoanalytical Society. The only

statement of consequence during the Melbourne seminar was a statement about the impossibility to negotiate with terrorists, because of the effectiveness of the brainwashing techniques their leaders use.

I listened to this in a state of astonishment. I attempted to develop a discussion, by pointing out that failure to negotiate with terrorists actually might be a result of the conviction held by a terrorist, with the intensity bordering on a delusion, that his actions are the ultimate expression of goodness. My attempt was met with freezing disapproval. I understood that the presenter's political views prevented clinical dispassion and objectivity. I decided to risk being shouted down or ignored in my heresy. The following is the result.

Why?

For the great majority of people raised in the Judeo-Christian framework of emotional and societal reference, suicide is regarded as an ultimate self-denial and addressed as a dangerous illness. In this religious context suicide and homicide are regarded as an ultimate sin. The concept of the sanctity of life is a cornerstone of the scale of the values governing Western civilisation. However, the Islamic interpretation of this concept is different.

Sam:

Those who believe in the finality of death (i.e., that there is no after-life) – they are the ones who advocate suicide and regard it as a matter of personal choice. On the other hand, those who firmly believe in some form of existence after corporeal death – they condemn suicide and judge it to be a major sin. Yet, rationally, the situation should have been reversed: it should have been easier for someone who believed in continuity after death to terminate this phase of existence on the way to the next. Those who faced void, finality, non-existence, vanishing – should have been greatly deterred by it and should have refrained even from entertaining the idea. Either the latter do not really believe what they profess to believe – or something is wrong with rationality. One would tend to suspect the former.

Suicide is very different from self sacrifice, avoidable martyrdom, engaging in life risking activities, refusal to prolong one's life through medical treatment, euthanasia, overdosing and self inflicted death that is the result of coercion. What is common to all these is the operational mode: a death caused by one's own actions. In all these behaviors, a foreknowledge of the risk of death is present coupled with its acceptance. But all else is so different that they cannot be regarded as belonging to the same class. Suicide is chiefly intended to terminate a life – the other acts are aimed at perpetuating, strengthening and defending values.

Those who commit suicide do so because they firmly believe in the finiteness of life and in the finality of death. They prefer termination to continuation. Yet, all the others, the observers of this phenomenon, are horrified by this preference. They abhor it. This has to do with out understanding of the meaning of life.

Ultimately, life has only meanings that we attribute and ascribe to it. Such a meaning can be external (God's plan) or internal (meaning generated through arbitrary selection of a frame of reference). But, in any case, it must be actively selected, adopted and espoused. The difference is that, in the case of external meanings, we have no way to judge their validity and quality (is God's plan for us a good one or not?). We just "take them on" because they are

big, all encompassing and of a good "source". A hyper-goal generated by a superstructural plan tends to lend meaning to our transient goals and structures by endowing them with the gift of eternity. Something eternal is always judged more meaningful than something temporal. If a thing of less or no value acquires value by becoming part of a thing eternal – than the meaning and value reside with the quality of being eternal – not with the thing thus endowed. It is not a question of success. Plans temporal are as successfully implemented as designs eternal. Actually, there is no meaning to the question: is this eternal plan / process / design successful because success is a temporal thing, linked to endeavors that have clear beginnings and ends.

This, therefore, is the first requirement: our life can become meaningful only by integrating into a thing, a process, a being eternal. In other words, continuity (the temporal image of eternity, to paraphrase a great philosopher) is of the essence. Terminating our life at will renders them meaningless. A natural termination of our life is naturally preordained. A natural death is part and parcel of the very eternal process, thing or being which lends meaning to life. To die naturally is to become part of an eternity, a cycle, which goes on forever of life, death and renewal. This cyclic view of life and the creation is inevitable within any thought system, which incorporates a notion of eternity. Because everything is possible given an eternal amount of time – so are resurrection and reincarnation, the afterlife, hell and other beliefs adhered to by the eternal lot.

Sidgwick raised the second requirement and with certain modifications by other philosophers, it reads: to begin to appreciate values and meanings, a consciousness (intelligence) must exist. True, the value or meaning must reside in or pertain to a thing outside the consciousness / intelligence. But, even then, only conscious, intelligent people will be able to appreciate it.

We can fuse the two views: the meaning of life is the consequence of their being part of some eternal goal, plan, process, thing, or being. Whether this holds true or does not – a consciousness is called for in order to appreciate life's meaning. Life is meaningless in the absence of consciousness or intelligence. Suicide flies in the face of both requirements: it is a clear and present demonstration of the transience of life (the negation of the NATURAL eternal cycles or processes). It also eliminates the consciousness and intelligence that could have judged life to have been meaningful had it survived. Actually, this very consciousness / intelligence decides, in the case of suicide, that life has no meaning whatsoever. To a very large extent, the meaning of life is perceived to be a collective matter of conformity. Suicide is a statement, writ in blood, that the community is wrong, that life is meaningless and final (otherwise, the suicide would not have been committed).

This is where life ends and social judgment commences. Society cannot admit that it is against freedom of expression (suicide is, after all, a statement). It never could. It always preferred to cast the suicides in the role of criminals (and, therefore, bereft of any or many civil rights). According to still prevailing views, the suicide violates unwritten contracts with himself, with others (society) and, many might add, with God (or with Nature with a capital N). Thomas Aquinas said that suicide was not only unnatural (organisms strive to survive, not to self annihilate) – but it also adversely affects the community and violates God's property rights. The latter argument is interesting: God is supposed to own the soul and it is a gift (in Jewish writings, a deposit) to the individual. A suicide, therefore, has to do with the abuse or misuse of God's possessions, temporarily lodged in a corporeal mansion. This implies that suicide affects the eternal, immutable soul. Aquinas refrains from elaborating exactly how a

distinctly physical and material act alters the structure and / or the properties of something as ethereal as the soul. Hundreds of years later, Blackstone, the codifier of British Law, concurred. The state, according to this juridical mind, has a right to prevent and to punish for suicide and for attempted suicide. Suicide is self-murder, he wrote, and, therefore, a grave felony. In certain countries, this still is the case. In Israel, for instance, a soldier is considered to be "army property" and any attempted suicide is severely punished as being "attempt at corrupting army possessions". Indeed, this is paternalism at its worst, the kind that objectifies its subjects. People are treated as possessions in this malignant mutation of benevolence. Such paternalism acts against adults expressing fully informed consent. It is an explicit threat to autonomy, freedom and privacy. Rational, fully competent adults should be spared this form of state intervention. It served as a magnificent tool for the suppression of dissidence in places like Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany. Mostly, it tends to breed "victimless crimes". Gamblers, homosexuals, communists, suicides – the list is long. All have been "protected from themselves" by Big Brothers in disguise. Wherever humans possess a right – there is a correlative obligation not to act in a way that will prevent the exercise of such right, whether actively (preventing it), or passively (reporting it). In many cases, not only is suicide consented to by a competent adult (in full possession of his faculties) – it also increases utility both for the individual involved and for society. The only exception is, of course, where minors or incompetent adults (the mentally retarded, the mentally insane, etc.) are involved. Then a paternalistic obligation seems to exist. I use the cautious term "seems" because life is such a basic and deep set phenomenon that even the incompetents can fully gauge its significance and make "informed" decisions, in my view. In any case, no one is better able to evaluate the quality of life (and the ensuing justifications of a suicide) of a mentally incompetent person – than that person himself.

The paternalists claim that no competent adult will ever decide to commit suicide. No one in "his right mind" will elect this option. This contention is, of course, obliterated both by history and by psychology. But a derivative argument seems to be more forceful. Some people whose suicides were prevented felt very happy that they were. They felt elated to have the gift of life back. Isn't this sufficient a reason to intervene? Absolutely, not. All of us are engaged in making irreversible decisions. For some of these decisions, we are likely to pay very dearly. Is this a reason to stop us from making them? Should the state be allowed to prevent a couple from marrying because of genetic incompatibility? Should an overpopulated country institute forced abortions? Should smoking be banned for the higher risk groups? The answers seem to be clear and negative. There is a double moral standard when it comes to suicide. People are permitted to destroy their lives only in certain prescribed ways.

And if the very notion of suicide is immoral, even criminal – why stop at individuals? Why not apply the same prohibition to political organizations (such as the Yugoslav Federation or the USSR or East Germany or Czechoslovakia, to mention four recent examples)? To groups of people? To institutions, corporations, funds, not for profit organizations, international organizations and so on? This fast deteriorates to the land of absurdities, long inhabited by the opponents of suicide.

See these:

[The Myth of the Right to Life](#)

[Ethical Relativism and Absolute Taboos](#)

Michael:

There is a provision, that a person who is killed while defending Islam becomes a martyr and is guaranteed a place in Paradise with all the attendant benefits, including the services of quite a number of virgins. This particular Islamic belief is extensively used in the process of training suicide bombers. As a historical aside, the British occupation authorities during the time of the Palestine Mandate when confronted with similar tactics used to wrap the remains of terrorists in a pig's skin for burial.

This practice automatically prevented the aspiration of the bomber to exist in the state of perpetual orgasm in paradise. The terrorist campaign petered out.

Sam:

All soldiers are brainwashed into believing that they are fighting for a higher cause and all war casualties are treated by their countries or organizations as secular saints. Israeli soldiers (I have been one myself) are raised on myths of self-sacrifice (as were Soviet soldiers). Muslim suicide bombers regard themselves as fighters first and martyrs second. They are no different than any other soldiers in the world. In war, one is expected to die and sacrifice one's life.

Michael:

Why now? Why at all?

This question is not as naïve as it seems. It is interesting to note, that terrorism as we understand it now came to being after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its ignominious retreat from Afghanistan. I believe that these events are interconnected.

Sam:

In my view, this is simply wrong. Modern terrorism - multinational, amorphous networks, with access to technology - is at least 50 years old. The only "new" element is the religious overtones. Religion replaced nationalism as an ideology - only to be expected in a post-nationalistic world.

Michael:

During its heyday, the Soviet Union and its allies were providing training facilities as well as tuition for a variety of "freedom fighters" - the PLO, IRA, Red Brigades and many others. To a greater extent, the Soviets were able to control terrorist activities by bankrolling them and providing logistical, organisational and infrastructural support.

Sam:

As did the United States and Israel. Bin-Laden, for example, was bankrolled by the CIA. Israel aided the nascent Hamas and Hizbullah.

Michael:

The collapse of the Soviet Union, its retreat from Afghanistan and the American humiliation in the Tehran Embassy has left a lot of militants without Soviet or American support. No doubt, there were a lot of anxious terrorists around. They may have thought that they were not needed anymore. Similar anxieties were played out in the Special Services of several Western nations - the end of the Cold War has left them feeling superfluous. With militants, who before the USSR's disintegration were able to milk both sides of the conflict, things were even more complicated. Before, there were Israelis to scare, Americans to fool, Soviets to massage - life was good. Classic splitting in other words. Now, they had to find alternative sources of finance. Nature does not tolerate a vacuum. Other paymasters were found.

The ultimate source of money supply, however, remained the same. The West.

Western societies continued to buy oil and narcotics, ultimately financing the terrorist assault upon themselves.

Sam:

I largely agree with the rest of this document - with one, very large, reservation:

The West needs enemies at least as much as its enemies need the West. Having an enemy is good for every ruler, democratically elected or not. Ask George Bush.

Michael:

Clash of Civilisations

There has been much discussion about the possibility of the clash of civilizations. I suppose it is within the frame of Western infidels versus Muslim defenders of righteousness. Western reluctance to talk about the clash of civilizations is understandable - nobody sane and responsible likes to support inflammatory and provocative concepts.

I am trying to understand my enemy and, if possible, to learn from him. I also think that it is self-defeating to deny the opposition's humanity or to trivialise his suffering. However, in my attempts to understand I am not hampered by persecutory activities of the state, religion or the mob. As an example, I am sure, that there are quite a number of people, who will find my writing fairly disagreeable, even, downright offensive. Nevertheless, I am free to enquire, to explore and to question. Thank God, never again I will have to go through the experience of burning personal letters at night on the meadow outside of my flat at the thought that the KGB might arrest me. I would not wish it on anyone. My counterparts in the Islamic theocracies are not in the same privileged situation. The concepts of secularism and individual rights, the greatest achievements of Western liberal societies, are largely unknown in the Islamic countries. Moreover, the intolerance to the existence and practice of alternative belief systems is likely to attract retribution and put the adherents of these beliefs in harms' way. It is significant to note that in Islamic society a change of personal religious doctrine, so easily available in the West, is not possible. A person, born Muslim can not change his/her religion for fear of an apostasy charge and possible death. There is a startling similarity between the punishment meted out by the Soviets and Islamic theocrats to those, who are regarded as apostates.

Where does danger come from?

At the present time, the Arab dominated world is a basket case. The leadership of these countries, given free and safe election, would be booted out of the office at the nearest elections as incompetent and corrupt. But there are no free and safe elections. These countries, despite the exorbitant oil wealth in some, have the highest child mortality rates, lowest per capita incomes and lowest literacy rates in the world. The exotic destinations of Western tourists are stagnating, living from hand to mouth.

The government controls everything, women are regarded as chattels and a lack of respect for human rights is the norm. The result is, overwhelmingly - poverty, the obnoxious, degrading kind, the kind where there is no sewer, children do not know what secular school is, where the weak are not protected, where officials are corrupt and a doctor is not accessible.

Diseases are rife, the young are angry, the old are helpless, the future is bleak. They see Western riches on TV, the internet is becoming available, they listen to the Western music, watch Western movies and are asking questions - why do we not have the same? What's wrong with us? Whose fault is it?

There are two versions of an answer they are given.

One - they (Westerners/America) do not want us to have it, they want to dominate us. Two - the Jews are out to destroy our people and deny our cultural heritage to us.

Both answers are interchangeable and, what is more important, absolve both rulers and subjects from assessing reality objectively. This point of self-perception of victimhood as a result of collective denial is one of the very few points of a tacit agreement between rulers and the ruled in the Arab world. This state of denial is facilitated by conspiracy theories, so common in closed societies. The increase of entropy inevitably leads to stagnation and possibility of implosion as happened in the USSR.

In psychodynamic terms one can hypothesize that the dominant emotional background of this people's existence would be the duality of unresolved anger and unrelieved state of narcissistic injury in the context of perpetually reinforced anxiety.

It is not by chance that the most common self-descriptions of the aggrievement suffered by Arabs in most of the encounters with the Israelis or other non-Arabs is one of humiliation. In historical terms, the humiliation or its perception, as a background of a national feeling state, could be manipulated for political goals, as happened with German people after the signing of the Versailles Treaty.

What aspects of Islamic-informed society seem to be likely to provoke a conflict with the Western liberal democracies?

Arab people, as any other oppressed, are unable to express dissatisfaction with their rulers legitimately. As we know, totalitarian regimes are not disposed kindly towards their critics. Totalitarian governments rule by fear and terror. According to Nadezhda Mandelshtam, wife of the famous Russian poet Osip who was killed on Stalin's orders, as a result of a terror campaign, - "Russian people were slightly unbalanced mentally - not exactly ill, but not normal either". Fear affects people regardless of geography - be it Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, Rwandan genocide or Hussein's Iraq. To criticize the government openly a citizen of an Arab State must be either a member of the militant Islamic orthodoxy or recklessly

indifferent towards his own safety or both. Fear is a continuous state of mind of an ordinary Arab citizen. He knows, that the ruler's displeasure will be expressed violently - suppression of Syrian revolt by Hafez Assad, gassing of the Kurds and mass graves of Shiites by Saddam Hussein, massacre of the Palestinians in Jordan - the list is quite long. On the other hand there is a relentless personal necessity to express anger, to let it spill out, no matter in which direction. The anger caused by the daily assault on human dignity, humiliation and jealousy felt by the citizens of the Arab states towards rich and free Westerners, anger towards Arab ruling elites, inordinately extensive influence of Islamic practices on the society's life - all these factors contribute to the increase of the pressure in the emotional pressure cooker. The emotional background is remarkably similar to the glorious days of the Soviet Union. The absence of independent justice, corrupt law enforcement, non-existent freedom of press, religion, assemblies, speech, lack of secular education - the list is endless. It is in the interest of the existing ruling elites in the Islamic countries to direct this ever present, simmering anger of the populus towards outsiders, such as Westerners or Jews.

Who are the "Shaheeds"?

In the process of suicide, or martyrdom as Islamic extremists prefer to call it, there are two important components - motivation of the deed and the personality of the "shaheed". Motivation of the perpetrator consists of the many factors. To start with, he (mostly shaheeds are males) is surrounded by human misery. The conditions of life in the most Arabic countries are inimical to human dignity and represent what I consider to be a state of a permanent insult - poverty, filth, lack of safety, powerlessness, corruption, contempt and despotism, to name just a few. If we are to accept the universality of human species, these conditions which are virtually pathognomonic to the totalitarian society, are bound to traumatize people.

They live in the state of perpetual emotional trauma. This trauma need not be personal. On the contrary, personal fulfillment and prosperity may enhance the feelings of guilt towards less fortunate brethren and predispose the person to manipulation by recruiters. People's misery, altruism, anger, relentless glorification of martyrdom and disregard for human life begets candidates. Manipulative tactics of recruiters into the ranks of shaheeds include the use of mentally retarded adolescents and young women guilty of extramarital affairs. Members of leadership families are excluded as a rule.

Especially traumatic experiences are the lot of Palestinians. These unfortunate people who, on top of the usual set of privations experienced by the majority of Arabs, had to go through wars, flight, loss of possessions and habitat, they have suffered uncertainty, fear and contempt of their brethren. They are kept in the refugee camps with the expressed purpose of breeding hatred, resentment and anger towards Israelis and the West. They live in squalor, dependent on the largesse of the Arab governments and an impotent UN, who, for political reasons will not allow or facilitate the resettlement of these people in the huge landmass of the Arab world. Arab Governments are finding it expedient to have a living example of the brutality of Israelis and Westerners. They (the governments) understand very well, that the state of trauma of their own people could be translated into a demand for reforms or even insurrection. They know well the degree of volatility and potential explosiveness of a brutalized population.

Virtually, these governments have no choice, but to have an identifiable enemy and to feed the population a diet of paranoia and conspiracy through the State-controlled media. Arab

Governments are inherently unstable. Their legitimacy is suspect. Their borders are the result of the historical chance. They are corrupt and incompetent. Their only critics of substance, and some measure of safety, are the Orthodox Muslims, who criticize the government from the position of piety and militant Islamism.

On this background, the existence of the rich West in general and Israel in particular is a constant, clear and well-identified threat to the ruling Arab elite or the aspirants to this title, exposing their inability to improve the lives of their citizenry. It is expedient to maintain the state of terror in the countries where the threat is coming from. Shaheeds are expendable which is consistent with the contempt Arab people are treated by their leaders. It also reminds of the contempt the Soviet rulers treated their population in similar circumstances.

Israel as West Berlin of the Middle East.

In political terms Israel could be compared with West Berlin during the Cold War. To the Soviet rulers, the virulent, visceral hatred of West Berlin, the tiny island of light in the sea of communist darkness was inspired by the geographic closeness of the objective fact of its better functioning and ability to provide its citizens with better life. It was pretty difficult for the Soviet nomenklatura to describe East Berlin as paradise, looking across the Wall at the glittering Kurfurstendamm or after watching Western TV. Therefore, the Soviet Nomenclatura felt threatened by the demonstration of its incompetence and dishonesty. Similarly, the existence of Israel in the immediate vicinity of the decrepit and dysfunctional Arab countries is regarded by both - the population as well as a government as an insult, a gross humiliation, an unspoken but real accusation of incompetence and impotence. In the macho Arabic cultural tradition this is too much to bear.

To add an insult to injury, the protective stance by the USA towards Israel, however lacking consistency and continuity is perceived by the Arabs in rather biblical terms as a rejection of one son in favor of another. Fear of rejection and abandonment is one of hallmarks of a traumatised, dependent and anxious human. In this context, the construction of the separation perimeter between Palestinians and Israelis and the Palestinian reaction to it has fairly significant psychodynamic connotation. The anger and distress Palestinians feel at the sight of this wall, apart from political, military and economic implication has also a deeply disturbing dimension of rejection by the enemy. This rejection and abandonment, if anything, has a very powerful anxiety provoking capacity. Anxiety of a dependent human, terrified of being abandoned.

The corollary to this is incompatibility of the Arab and Israeli aims. Arab Governments have no tangible benefits from peace with Israel. They have nothing to gain and stand to lose power in case of a genuine peace with Israel, as a result of inevitability of reformist demands by their population.

What are the conditions likely to breed terror?

A combination of:

* subconscious fear of rejection and abandonment by the system, government, "the West" - anything or anybody identified as introjected symbol or object of authority; important other.

- * permanent state of traumatization by the conditions of living in a poverty-stricken, closed totalitarian society leading to high degree of anxiety/fear
- * narcissistic injury of implied incompetence/impotence, compounded by shame and rage which is difficult and dangerous to express
- * immersion into and identification with the most militant and literal interpretation of the Islamic doctrine as a means of self-worth enhancement, acquisition of the feeling of aloofness and specialness
- * lack of the tradition of unimpeded intellectual pursuit, culture of questioning the written word and tolerance of the differences of opinion
- * deep-seated inferiority complex
- * the aggressive hatred of the liberal West and Israel as the only approved channel of discharging anger

The points listed above create a background of a quiet determination, burning anger, which at last had found an effective outlet and resolute conviction of one's own infallibility. A terrorist is implacably determined to inflict a maximum of damage to the people, structures or doctrines, which he perceives to be wrong. He is not capable of conceiving that there are alternative belief systems worthy of taking them seriously or according these beliefs a legitimacy of an intrinsic value content. Besides, it must be a wonderfully empowering feeling - to have a God-like power of judgment, power of giving or withholding life or death. For someone, who spent his life in squalid streets of Peshawar or refugee camp around Beirut, it represents an ultimate high - to be able to have this much power.

Also, coming from the cultural background conducive to the development of the borderline traits - as evidenced by the self-flagellation of the Shiite pilgrims - self-mutilation and self-infliction of pain has some attractive connotations. For instance, it reduces the overwhelming anxiety in the sufferer. However, it also bespeaks the existence of suffering, which cannot be expressed by conventional means for a variety of reasons. I think this is an important point, which should be elaborated upon. This type of behavior could be compared with the acting out of the profoundly dependent human, who found out that he is not loved by the important other. The crashing realization of abandonment, unsatisfied dependency needs - be it material, emotional or spiritual - anger at the rejector and desire to inflict damage commensurate with the suffering experienced by the rejectee creates the desire for revenge. It brings us back to the heightened state of narcissistic injury, which brooks no logic, reason or mollification. This emotional state, compounded by confounders of religion and culture, political and economic expediency, altruistic and manic defenses is skillfully manipulated by the leaders of the terrorist organisations. As long as Arab countries will be plagued by totalitarianism, monopolistic Islamic theocracy, near total absence of human rights and poverty - we will suffer further terrorist attacks.

What is group psychopathology?

It should be clear by now, that I took as a model of the concept of a group psychopathology a comparison between seemingly incompatible state systems - the Soviet Union and Arab states conglomeration. I have to accept, that in doing so I have displayed a significant bias - be it

religious, cultural or emotional. On the other hand, the formation of this particular model was dictated by my extensive personal experience of living inside a totalitarian state: my belief in the universality of human species and the universality of human emotional reactions to fear. In this case - universality of the human reaction to fear inflicted by a totalitarian regime. I believe that it bears repeating, that the fear, inflicted by the totalitarian regime is the breeding ground for terror. This fear, by traumatizing thousands, creates a milieu of group psychopathology or what we, in the relatively calm West call personality disorder.

Therefore, the abhorrence of totalitarian regimes is not only in their denial of human rights, freedom and safety to their own and others. The danger of these regimes is also in inflicting on multitudes the state of mass fear and, consequently, the state of psychological abnormality. We know that a significant personal psychopathology might be the result of childhood trauma - be it sexual, physical or emotional. Traumatization of a group would lead to the same outcome. The results, for the group involved will be of the most serious kind. The group cohesion, trust, closeness, intimacy, respect for others, feeling of self worth, self respect - all of these parameters will be affected.

On the other hand, the migration to societies with the relatively low levels of fear has healing properties for the migrants and refugees from the totalitarian societies. Far from being traumatic, such a migration plays a role of a healer. Everyday acts of simple kindness, respectful treatment by authorities and ability to sleep without fear of arbitrary arrest - all of that is a potent restorative. In my choice of a model for presenting my views, I am mindful, that there are many other totalitarian regimes on the planet. The UN General Assembly is full of them. I would like to make it clear, that the principle of universality of human species applies - it does not matter, where the fear is inflicted - in Stalinist Russia, the Arab Middle East, Sudanese Darfur or Khmer Rouge Cambodia, the consequences are equally devastating.

How the Nation /group heal?

A task of such magnitude is clearly beyond the scope of this dialog.

Nevertheless, I have some points to make.

Firstly, the understanding of the existence and extent of group psychopathology is an important first step. The reason I am saying this is that one cannot treat an illness without a knowledge that the illness exists to start with.

Secondly, the victory in the Cold war was brought about not only because of overwhelming superiority of the USA, but also because of the other factors, such as propaganda, economic potential, political will, relentless pressure in all possible points. There is a treasure trove of the accumulated experience in nation building. In my part of the dialog I made a particular point of comparing Arab states with the USSR. I believe, what worked then, will work again.

Thirdly, there is a treasure trove of successful nation-building in Germany, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore by the much maligned USA. These exercises, without the parallel in history, (some of them could be served as the remarkable examples of magnanimity in victory), clearly show the possibilities and benefits for the population of the formerly hostile states.

I also believe, that we should stop financing terrorism against ourselves - we should not buy the oil from countries which use our money to support militant Islamists. Consequently, the research and development of the alternatives to the fossil fuel should be regarded as part of the national security priorities.

Fourth, we should also physically eliminate the raw materials used for the production of narcotics. As a physician, I cannot be placid about what I see every day of my professional life. As a father, I am terrified of the prospective, that my children will become drug addicts and will not be able to utilize God's given opportunities to use their human capacities, because some crook sold them mind-altering drugs. Our work, as doctors, is very much influenced by the supply and demand of the illegal narcotics. Frankly, I don't give a toss, that the farmers who grow poppies or coca leaves are not able to grow anything else. To me, it is a political problem, like man-made famines in Africa. It might be possible to help these farmers out through the UN. The issue here is that the narcotics do not only serve as a money producing substance, they also serve as a very effective weapon against the free world. The concept of the destruction of the USA by the drugs was conceived by the USSR. It was called "Oruzhie individualnogo porazheniya" -

weapon of individual destruction. I am dealing with this weapon every day of my professional life - kids who become psychotic and remain so for the rest of their lives.

Fifth, the theocratic monopoly of the mullahs contributes to the closeness of Islamic societies. Equality of other religions, instead of Dhimmi status, would be useful in bringing these societies in to a family of democratic nations. Secular, rather than exclusively religious education would be crucial.

It is conceivable, that a host of measures, designed to reduce the level of the societal fear will be most conducive to the beginning of the process of healing of a traumatized nation.

Conclusion

Sigmund Freud was a good hater. He did not tolerate apostasy well. To those, who left the new church he established, he was persistently venomous.

Quoting Heine, he wrote: "One must forgive one's enemies, but not before they have been hanged." When one of his dissidents, Adler, died in 1937 on the trip to Aberdeen, Freud wrote to Zweig: "I don't understand your sympathy for Adler. For a Jew-boy out of Viennese suburb, a death in Aberdeen is an unheard-of career in itself".

Freud's break up with Jung was even more acrimonious. Both have never forgiven each other for the lost hopes, aspirations and dreams. Jung, undoubtedly gifted and talented physician, was scarred enough by this separation to seek a shelter in the seductive simplicity of the Nazional-

Socialism. Jung wrote: "One can not of course accept that Freud or Adler is a generally valid representative of European mankind. The Jew as a relative nomad has never created, and presumably never will create, a cultural form of his own, for all his instincts and talent are dependent on a more or less civilised host people. In my view it has been a great mistake of medical psychology to apply Jewish categories, which are not even valid for all Jews, to Christian Germans and Slavs. In this way the most precious secret of Teutonic man, the deep-

rooted, creative awareness of his soul, has been explained away as a banal infantile sump, while my warning voice, over the decades, was suspected of anti-Semitism. has the mighty phenomenon of National-Socialism, at which the whole world gazes in astonishment, taught them to know better?"

Leaving the perceptible anger of the unforgiven son towards harsh and rejecting father aside, I'd like to get to the core of Jung's accusation.

What he is saying, in my mind, is that there are different mechanisms, by which different humans react to the same stressors. I disagree. As I have written before, I believe, that fear affects humans, as members of the same biological species, in the same way, regardless of race, color, religion or origin. While the critique of Freud's writing is a legitimate intellectual exercise, the acceptance of the universality of human reactions to similar stimuli could not be opposed on any reasonable ground.

My contributions to this dialog were written from the distinctly Jewish point of view. Can this view be regarded as universal ? I guess, it depends which point of view my reader supports - Freud's or Jung's.

Also Read

[*Narcissists, Group Behavior, and Terrorism*](#)

[*For the Love of God*](#)

[*Islam and Liberalism*](#)

[*Dialog about anti-Semitism*](#)

[*Narcissistic Leaders*](#)

[*Collective Narcissism*](#)

[*Hitler - The Inverted Saint*](#)

[*Narcissism in the Boardroom*](#)

[*Lasch, The Cultural Narcissist*](#)

[*Narcissists in Positions of Authority*](#)

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